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HOSTAGES TO FORTUNE

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# HOSTAGES TO FORTUNE

A Nobel

BY THE AUTHOR OF  
'LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET'

ETC. ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. III.



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# HOSTAGES TO FORTUNE



## CHAPTER I.

‘For men at most differ as Heaven and earth,  
But women, worst and best, as Heaven and Hell.’

TUESDAY morning brings Herman’s answer to his wife’s letter. It is brief, but in some measure reassuring. He makes light of her anxieties ; he ridicules her fears.

‘First, as for the *Day Star*, dearest,’ he writes, after a few affectionate commonplaces, ‘such an offer as you speak of has been made, and is, I freely confess, a tempting offer. So complete a change of scene, the life and movement of the thing, would, I believe, refresh and stimulate me. I have been growing dismally stagnant of late, and find, as you have yourself observed, the ink flow less freely from my pen than of old. But, inviting as the oppor-



tunity is, I feel that, as a family man, I am bound to forego it, and you never would have heard a syllable about it from me. It was rather officious of Lyndhurst to mention the affair ; but these idle men are such inveterate gossips. Be content, dear ; I sit in my den at Fulham like a spider in his hole, and spin copy, with an occasional feeling that I am spinning it, like the spider, out of my own internal economy.

‘I am sorry you disapprove of the verses. They were struck off in the heat of the moment, and mean very little except that I was tired and depressed when I wrote them. Be happy, dearest ; enjoy the simple pleasures of Lochwithian, and come back to me by and by blooming and beautiful as when first I saw your face shining upon me under Dewrance’s umbrella at the Eisteddfod.

‘The horses are well ; the house has a dusty look in your absence, and there is more noise of a hilarious kind in the kitchen of an evening than I quite like. Kiss our pet with a hundred superfluous kisses for me.—Your ever-loving husband,

‘HERMAN.’

She is comforted by this letter, vague as its assurances are. Poor fellow, he owns to a passing weariness of his art. If he would but give himself rest—surrender his expensive house and servants, sell carriages and horses, and come down here, where they might live so cheaply! Editha explores an empty house in her walk that morning, and longs to furnish it for herself and Herman. It is a rustic dwelling, on the slope of one of the great green hills that look down upon the old Priory—a roomy, comfortable cottage, built by Mr. Petherick's predecessor, and lately occupied by a retired naval man, who made garden and orchard the pride of his life. This old post-captain has been dead some months, and his cherished garden has been neglected while the house has been waiting for a new tenant. It lies a little off the high-road, and is at present eight miles from a railway station; but the view from its windows is one of the finest in this part of the country, and the air is purest ether. A year hence there will be a loop line to Lochwithian, and this aerie amidst the hills will be so much the more accessible.

Editha wanders in and out of the empty rooms,

while the baby and his nurse sit on the lawn plucking daisies among the long grass. She finds a lovely room at the side of the house, with a French window and balcony overhanging the valley, a waterfall babbling below, and rough crag and pinewood towering above. Such a study for a poet ! Here, surely, inspiration would come as it never could in flat sluggish Fulham. Above there are two airy rooms, which would make the most delightful nurseries for baby. There are just rooms enough for comfort, none to spare for show—a snug little dining-room, suggestive of a *partie carrée* at most ; a rustic drawing-room, with a big bow-window.

‘How happily we might live here,’ muses Editha, ‘wasting no money upon dinner-giving or display ! We could manage with one servant even, and I could help to keep the house nice. What pleasure it would be to me to work for Herman—to be really useful to him, instead of being only an occasion of expense as I am now ! And how delightful to live close to Ruth and papa ! We could go to London sometimes, of course—for Herman to superintend the production of his plays, for instance—but I cannot think that

it is necessary for an imaginative writer to live in London.'

The days slip smoothly, gently by at Lochwithian—not altogether happy, for the wife's heart is full of cares for her absent husband, but brightened by many household joys. To be with Ruth, to see her child happy, to meet old friends again, and go back to the sweetness of youth—all this should be enough for happiness, Editha thinks; but her heart yearns for the day when she can reasonably go back to Fulham.

Herman's letters all entreat her to stay—to make the most of home joys, her beloved hills, her old pensioners, and not to hurry back to the murky suburb, which has a dusty shabby look now the freshness of summer has worn off, Herman tells her.

Hamilton Lyndhurst comes over to Lochwithian two or three times a week, and joins the Squire and his daughter in their rides and drives, contriving to render himself agreeable to both. He cultivates his acquaintance with Ruth, and brightens many an hour for the invalid with his music. In this fortnight of

his life he enjoys more domestic happiness than he has known in all his previous existence. The freshness of the sensation makes it strangely sweet to him. This equable life, flowing gently on, without pleasures, without excitements, is something utterly new to him.

The fortnight hurries by like a dream, as it seems to Mr. Lyndhurst, and yet it is the longest fortnight in his life to look back upon—a complete existence in miniature.

‘My mind has taken root here,’ he tells Ruth, when he pays his farewell visit. ‘I feel as if I were a native of these hills, instead of the miserable Cockney I am. I shall fancy myself all adrift again when I return to stony Babylon.’

To stony Babylon he does return, timing his departure cleverly—just two days before Editha’s. This looks well, and gives an accidental air to his presence in the neighbourhood of Lochwithian. A less-practised schemer would have lingered to the last, and would have managed to be Editha’s escort on the homeward journey. Lyndhurst departs without having awakened anybody’s suspicions as to the



purity of his intentions—unless, indeed, there lurks some shadow of distrust in the pastor's honest mind.

‘I don't quite like that fellow,’ says Mr. Petherick, when the Squire has been praising his departed guest. ‘He is too smooth. Velvet paws always remind me of cats. He made himself so abominably agreeable to us all; and yet he seemed a fish out of water, somehow, in spite of his easy manner and his air of frank enjoyment. He is not the type of man to be so delighted with our countrified pleasures. Nature and he don't harmonise. What kind of person is he in town, Editha?’

Mrs. Westray smiles at the question.

‘I think he is very much the same man you have seen here—not quite so frank or genial, perhaps. But Herman's friends are always talking criticism, and a man like Mr. Lyndhurst says ill-natured things for the sake of being witty. He takes life very easily, and seems to have no particular purpose in his existence. People call him Midas, and say that all he touches turns to gold; but I doubt if he has much enjoyment of his wealth. He always has rather

a tired air, as if he had tried all the pleasures of life and found them vanity. I never saw him seem so near happiness as he has seemed to be here.'

'Humph!' mutters Mr. Petherick, 'that's rather odd, isn't it? Buttercups and daisies would seem scarcely the fare for that kind of man—unless he had some motive for liking the buttercups and daisies. Perhaps it's the novelty that pleases him. I shouldn't wonder if Nebuchadnezzar enjoyed the grass of the field after the barbaric splendour of his palace. However, I must confess your Mr. Lyndhurst is a problem I can't solve. Does your husband like him?'

'Very much. He is one of our most frequent guests.'

At last the day comes for Editha's return. She has been at the Priory nearly a month, and her presence has done wonders for Ruth—has improved her so much, that Editha forgets the fears which were aroused by her sister's altered looks on her arrival. The sisters spend their last evening together alone, in confidential talk.

'Darling, I look forward to the delight of coming

down here to live some day,' Editha says. 'I know that Herman is tired of London, though I cannot induce him to believe that he is. All his pleasures are monotonous, and the life he leads in town is wearing him out. I see it too plainly. We are living expensively, and his brain is being exhausted by the effort to keep pace with our expenditure. If I could persuade him to do without the society of a few people who amuse him, the rest would be easy. He is by nature a student, and I know that he could be as happy as the day is long in Captain Fitzgerald's cottage.'

'He has your health and happiness to consider as well as his own,' replies Ruth; 'and I know how much better you and baby would be in this clear air. I don't think the Fulham air suits you, dear. You were looking ill and worried when you came.'

'I had been anxious about Herman.'

They talk hopefully of the happy life they might lead if Herman would but consent to forsake clubs and parties, and be satisfied with a bucolic or meditative existence, remote from the stir and thrill of crowds. Fair dream of a future which is perchance

impossible ! It serves to make the sisters happy on this their last evening.

Editha departs at noonday on a blazing Saturday towards the end of August, accompanied by nurse and baby, trunks, baskets, rugs, umbrellas, a basket of ferns for her garden, and a huge hamper of country produce—quite a train of heavy luggage, which occupies one end of the little platform at Llandrysak, and throws the two Welsh porters into convulsions of excitement and bathes them in perspiration. Betsy Evans, the new cook, is to follow her mistress in a few days, when Mrs. Files has been disposed of.

The Squire and the Parson are both in attendance, and Mrs. Gredby has descended from her fastness to offer tribute, in the shape of a large fan-shaped nosegay, fragrant with southernwood and clove carnations, and banked up with hollyhocks, which floral stack she calls a ‘bokay.’

‘I should like you to have something to remember me by when you get home, Miss Editha,’ she says, ‘and the little gentleman likewise, so I’ve made so bold as to bring you a pair of ducks.’

‘O Mrs. Gredby, the flowers would have been enough,’ remonstrates Editha, as the landlady of the New Inn withdraws the corner of a white cloth from her basket, and displays two innocent yellow beaks hanging pathetically over the wickerwork.

‘No, Miss Editha; flowers is very well, but you put ’em in a jug on your drawning-room table, and you think no more of ’em. They pass clean out of your mind, But if you make your dinner off a fine pair of ducks, you don’t forget *them*. Their very richness makes an impression. There’s nothing hangs about you like roast ducks. You allude to them afterwards, and say, “The day we had Mrs. Gredby’s ducks.” They’re something to look back upon, you see, miss.’

‘I shall remember your kindness in any case, dear Mrs. Gredby,’ says Editha, smiling.

‘Yes, miss, and you’ll remember them ducks, and so will your good gentleman. There hasn’t been a finer couple killed this year, not within forty mile. I reared ’em myself, so I ought to know—besides feeding of ’em out of my own mouth when they was weakly.’



Mrs. Gredby expatiates on the baby—a chubby, rosy-cheeked young gentleman, in a white pelisse and small sailor-hat; and anon comes the train of some half-dozen carriages, which is to convey Editha to Shrewsbury. She has books and papers to read, she has a basket of Lochwithian peaches, and, best of all, she has baby; so the journey can hardly be tedious, thinks the Squire, as he kisses her and bids her God-speed.

The journey does seem to her somewhat tedious, in spite of books and baby. Once away from Lochwithian, her ardent desire to be home makes her restless and impatient—inwardly impatient only, for in outward seeming she is all gentleness and repose. She is not given to shifting her burden of weariness upon other people's shoulders.

It is nearly a week since she has heard from Herman, and that fact is sufficient to fill her with uneasiness. She feels that she has been too long absent from home and duty—feels herself a neglectful wife, although she has been only obeying Herman in prolonging her stay at the Priory. How she longs to be with him—to look in his face, to see if he has

still that worn worried look which made her wretched before she left home ! How she longs to be sitting opposite him in the dear little study, pouring out that strong green tea which is his nectar, and listening to his literary plans ! Between her and this delight there are only so many miles, so many hours ; but her impatience grows as the miles and hours lessen.

There is a delay of two hours at Shrewsbury, and it is evening—a breathless evening, with a gray thunderous sky—when the train enters the terminus. Editha has written to announce her coming, and expects to be met at the station by Herman after this her first absence. She scans the faces on the platform eagerly as the train moves past them, but cannot see that one face, with its bright recognising look, as she has been picturing it to herself throughout the journey.

He is there, no doubt, she tells herself, though not in the outer edge of the crowd. She alights hastily, and hardly stops to see that nurse and baby make their descent safely, so eager is she to find Herman.

‘Lor, mum, you’ve forgot your travelling-bag,’ says the nurse, plunging back into the carriage, where that treasury of feminine necessities has been left in the rack.

Editha cannot think of travelling-bags. She is looking for Herman ; but among all those hard-faced strangers his dear face appears not. The blankness sends a pang through her heart.

‘Hadn’t we better get a cab, mum?’ says the nurse.

‘Yes, Jane. I thought Mr. Westray would have been here to meet me.’

‘And I should have thought so too, mum ; such a lot of luggage as we’ve got, and baby getting so sleepy, poor lamb.’

The ‘poor lamb’ is decidedly fractious. The heat, the dust, the long journey have tried his youthful temper. Jane struggles with the double burden of infant and travelling-bag. She has the basket with Mrs. Gredby’s ducks over her arm. ‘Porter!’ she screams, in a shrill complaining voice, seeing that Mrs. Westray stands helpless, like a suddenly-awakened sleep-walker.

Porters come, and Mrs. Westray's luggage is selected from a mountain of trunks, portmanteaus, tin baths, japanned bonnet-boxes, and hampers, and then it is stacked upon a rickety-looking cab, and Editha, with one despairing look along the platform, takes her place in the vehicle.

It is a long drive to Fulham—a dreary one after that disappointment. How dull and murky London looks after the dewy freshness, the heavenward-mounting hills of Lochwithian—a hateful place to return to, assuredly, even though it means home! The long dusty road, the endless procession of shabby suburban villas, dust-whitened trees, cabs, straw, rags, and rubbish on the dusty pavements, sordid shops, ragged-looking omnibuses, everything ugly and poverty-stricken.

‘Why was he not at the station to meet me?’ That is the question which Mrs. Westray asks herself more or less throughout that long jolting journey. At the least it looks unkind. He is dining out, perhaps, at some social club-dinner; or has gone to see a new play produced at one of the theatres—the work of a rival.

‘If he had only written to tell me that he would be engaged this evening, I should have been spared the disappointment, thinks Editha, and then reproaches herself for feeling wounded by this seeming neglect.

‘No doubt he has some good reason,’ she tells herself. ‘He was too busy to come perhaps, and I shall find him at home, at work, and expecting me—in his old velvet coat, with books thrown about in every direction, and the tea-tray among his papers. Or if he has been obliged to go out, there will be a note to tell me why, and in an hour or two he will be back. I shall just have time to change my dusty clothes and see baby put to bed before he comes.’

Thus does Editha sprinkle cool patience upon her wounded spirit, and when at last the cab blunders into shabby old Fulham, whose High-street has a look of having been forgotten and left behind by the march of progress, she is prepared to accept things pleasantly, however they may fall out, and to give her husband loving greeting, even though he should have gone out to dinner on this particular Saturday, and not gladden her eyes till between



eleven and twelve o'clock. She will say like Desdemona, 'Men are not gods,' and will be content with something less than 'such observancy as fits the bridal.'

They have turned into the little lane that leads to Bridge-end House. Everything has the same dull and dusty look. The gray sky darkens with declining day. Putney-church clock strikes eight with a dismal clang. Nature wears no smile of welcome. The slate-coloured river frowns. The study blind is down. The cabman rings three times before the door is opened.

At last the parlour-maid appears, capless and slatternly. She comes slowly to the gate, opens it, and begins with a languid air to assist in carrying in the luggage. She brightens a little at sight of the ducks and the hamper.

'Is Mr. Westray at home?' asks Editha, very sure that he is not, since he has not appeared to greet her.

'At home, mum? O no, mum. Didn't you get his letter?'

'What letter?'

‘Telling you that he was going away, mum.’

‘Going away—where? Has he gone away?’

‘Yes, mum. He went off to France yesterday afternoon quite sudden. He wrote you a letter, mum, astin’ you to stay with your par while he was away, and he told cook and me not to expect you for the next three weeks. But I’m afraid Selina must have posted the letter too late.’

‘I had no letter,’ replies Editha, bearing up against this blow with a heroic effort. How cruel, how heartless of him to leave her thus! What temptation that fame or gain can hold out should weigh against the anguish she feels at this desertion? He has left her—heedless of her fears—left her to enter scenes of danger, left her perhaps to die.

‘Lor, mum, how white you do look!’ says Mary Ann, the parlour-maid, who is not without compassionate feeling even for that natural enemy, a mistress. ‘Master said he shouldn’t be away much above three weeks, and the change would do him good. He was looking ill and tired, cook and me noticed. But of course, being out so late of evenings would make a difference.’

‘He was out often,’ falters Editha, hardly knowing what she says. O, bitter agony of disappointed hope! She feels as if life could never seem fair again.

‘Well, yes, ’um. Pretty well every evening. It was dull and lonesome, you see, for him at home. Houses by the river is lonesome, except in the spring, when the laylocks and laburniums is in blow. And the blackbeadles was dreadful in the ’ot weather, that bold you’d meet ’em at every turn. I don’t wonder master didn’t care for his ’ome.’

Happily there is baby to be thought of. His fractiousness increases when he discovers that no preparations have been made for his reception; that the mattresses have to be dragged out of his cot and aired at a hastily-lighted fire, and that his nursery smells unpleasantly of mottled soap.

Cook has gone to pass the evening with her relations. The two young women bustle about, and get tea and a rasher for Mrs. Westray, and light the lamp in the study.

Here Editha takes her lonely meal, when baby has been cared for and made comfortable. The room

is just as Herman left it, and speaks to her of him : books piled on the floor, the chairs, the table ; papers scattered everywhere. His pipes, his tobacco-jars on table and mantelshelf. There was a time when he was less disorderly. These careless habits tell of a weary mind.

Hardest of all does it seem to have missed his farewell letter. Posted too late for yesterday's mail, it will only reach Lochwithian to-morrow morning, and cannot return to Fulham until Monday. All the blank desolate Sunday must intervene before Editha can have his letter, and know his reasons for breaking a promise that should have been held sacred. He assured her, when he laughed at her fears, that he had no idea of accepting the *Day Star's* offer, and in the face of that assurance—which to her seemed a promise—he is gone. She sends for an evening paper, and tries to make out how things are going on at the seat of war. 'Our special correspondent' writes of deadly strife and desolated villages in the coolest and airiest manner ; but his letter seems all confusion somehow to Editha. Krupp guns, mitrailleuses, skirmishes here, sorties there,

the prospect of an engagement before long ; French generals, princes of Hohenzollern behaving in the noblest and most gentlemanlike manner, and the general public being annihilated upon scientific principles. Shells, shrapnell, and explosives of all kinds flying about in every direction, even on one's paper as one writes, the correspondent insinuates. To-morrow, and Herman will have reached that horrid scene, and the Krupp guns, the mitrailleuses, the grape and shrapnell will be scattering destruction around his sacred head.

Editha would give anything to see some one who has seen her husband lately—one of his friends, who could tell her, in the absence of his letter, what urged his sudden departure. There is Mrs. Brandreth, for instance ; she would be sure to know.

‘I will call upon her after church to-morrow,’ decides Editha. She has never before had her carriage out on a Sunday, but on this occasion she orders the brougham for three o'clock. She has a feeling that Mrs. Brandreth is a person she can only visit in state.

It is not quite pleasant to her to call upon Myra,

for though she has never acknowledged the fact even to herself, there is a faint dislike or distrust of that accomplished woman in her mind. But she cannot call upon her husband's bachelor friends—those happy-go-lucky artists or literary men in Thistle-grove or South Kensington—and she is very anxious to see some one who has seen Herman just before his departure; so she vanquishes that undefined feeling of reluctance, and drives to Kensington Gore.

She has been careful to put on her most becoming dress, her prettiest bonnet. Her gloves are fresh; every detail of her toilette perfect. There is nothing of the forsaken Ariadne about her.

This happens to be her first visit to the house in Kensington Gore. She has been asked often, but to Sunday dinners and Sunday musical evenings—symposia she disapproves.

Mrs. Brandreth is at home; indeed she rarely stirs outside her door on Sunday after ten-o'clock matins at a ritualistic temple in the neighbourhood. 'A day upon which small tradesmen drive their families about in tax-carts, and large tradesmen's daughters exhibit their fine clothes in Kensington-

gardens, is a time for decent people to stay indoors,' she remarks, when any one suggests a Sabbath airing.

Mrs. Westray is taken up to the drawing-room—a room that has a cheerful glow winter or summer. The curtains and chair-covers are of a rich amber, the carpet deep brown shaded to palest yellow. These amber tones set off the ebony furniture, the majolica vases and plateaus of turquoise blue, the water-coloured landscapes on the warm dove-coloured walls.

Mrs. Brandreth is seated in the small inner room, among ferns and flowers which give a delicious coolness to the atmosphere. She is not alone. Lord Earlswood lolls upon one of the amber-satin chairs, turning the leaves of the *Connoisseur* languidly, as if he were looking vainly for some article within the limits of his capacity. He spends the greater part of his Sundays in attendance upon Myra. He has very little to say to her, and has no appearance of enjoying himself; but he comes and he stays, and she finds that it is impossible to enjoy a Sunday without this infliction.



Mrs. Brandreth receives Editha rapturously. Lord Earlswood abandons the *Connoisseur*, and shakes hands languidly, with a gentlemanlike melancholy, as a man too deeply afflicted by the burden of life to assume the mockery of smiles.

‘My dear Mrs. Westray, how good of you!’ cries Myra. ‘What a pleasant surprise! I thought you were to be in Wales for the next six weeks. Your husband told me so.’

Editha explains the tardily-posted letter.

‘And you came home and found him gone!’ exclaims Myra. ‘What a disappointment!’

‘London so empty too,’ interjects Lord Earlswood; ‘positively disgusting. Met seven men between Pall Mall and Whitehall yesterday—I counted ‘em. Four of them looked like government clerks, and the other three were parsons. One might as well live in a howling wilderness.’

‘It was a disappointment to find him gone,’ replies Editha gently, nay almost cheerfully. She has not come here to wear the willow. ‘But if the change does Herman good I must not complain. There is no danger, I suppose?’ she adds

anxiously, looking at his lordship as the higher authority.

‘O dear, no, I think not,’ says Lord Earlswood. ‘Newspaper correspondents never get shot—not in Europe, you know. In China they shoot all kinds of fellows—diplomatic, civil, anything you like. But I fancy these French and German beggars will respect the press. Wouldn’t like to see themselves cut up in the Radical papers—papers that write about the Millennium, and universal peace, and the lion lying down with the what’s-its-name, and that kind of thing.’

Editha takes what comfort she can from this speech, and turns to Myra. She has a great opinion of that lady’s worldly wisdom, and though she has not been able to like her, respects her industry and cleverness.

‘Did you see Herman shortly before he left?’ she asks.

‘He dined here last Sunday; but he had not then decided on accepting the *Day Star* people’s offer, though I know it tempted him.’

‘And he left on Friday. He must have decided very quickly at last.’

‘A fellow told me that the *Day Star* doubled their terms,’ says Lord Earlswood, ‘and Westray couldn’t withstand the filthy lucre.’

Editha blushes painfully. That expensive house-keeping is alone to blame for his need of money.

‘I do not think money had much to do with Mr. Westray’s decision,’ says Myra. ‘I believe he wanted change of scene and occupation. He was tired and bored. I never saw him looking so ill. I was one among his friends who advised him to accept the newspaper people’s offer. Anything was better than to see him grinding on at the same mill for ever.’

This stabs Editha to the heart. She grows a little paler than before, but gives no other token of her wound. Lord Earlswood rises and fidgets about the front drawing-room, only divided from the inner temple by amber curtains. He is seen through the draperied archway roaming listlessly, looking at the pictures, opening the show books, generally at a loss what to do with himself.

‘Did you hear how long he was to be away?’ Editha asks.

‘Not definitely. I don’t suppose he had any idea as to time. It might be a question of weeks or of months.’

‘If it is a question of months, I shall go to him,’ says Editha.

‘My dear Mrs. Westray, impossible! A man moving about here and there, at the seat of war—how could he be burdened with a wife? I can quite understand your anxiety, but you will see that in such a position he must be unfettered.’

‘Yes, I suppose so,’ Editha answers sadly. ‘I must be patient. Good-bye, Mrs. Brandreth. I thought you would be able to tell me more perhaps. But I shall get Herman’s letter to-morrow.’

‘You are not going to run away directly? You must stay and dine with me. I have some charming people coming—an Italian poet and his wife—quite in a friendly way. Lord Earlswood will stay perhaps, and Mr. Tollemey may drop in, but no one else. Do stop.’

‘You are very kind; but I am too anxious. I shall be happier at home with baby.’

Myra averts her face lest Mrs. Westray should

see the scorn that curls her lip at this remark. Of all things weak in woman Mrs. Brandreth most despises baby-worship.

‘ You won’t be persuaded? I’m so sorry. And you will go home and drink tea all the evening, and cry over baby, instead of making yourself happy here, as you might if you chose. That is the great difference between men and women. Women nurse their troubles and make much of them; men thrust their worries out of doors, and keep them there until they’re strong enough to climb in at the window.’

Mrs. Westray is not to be persuaded, and departs, feeling very little happier for her visit to Kensington Gore.

‘ Poor thing,’ murmurs Myra languidly, as Lord Earlswood comes prowling through the curtained archway, like a mentally exhausted wild-beast, ‘ how miserable she is!’

If other people’s misfortunes, in a general way, are not without a flavour of sweetness to poor humanity, what wicked rapture must this woman feel as she gloats over the agony of that soul whose

happiness she has envied, whose innocence and purity she has hated for two slow joyless years—slow, though they have been as a triumphal procession to the temple of fame; joyless, though they have been filled to overflowing with what the world calls pleasure!

‘Yes, she does seem cut up,’ replies Lord Earlswood, with a meditative air. ‘Rather unkind of Westray to go off like that.’

‘I daresay he was thoroughly tired of his home, or he wouldn’t have gone.’

‘Tired of his home, and with such a pretty wife! I thought it was a love-match.’

‘Love-matches are bad wear when a man marries a fool.’

‘Is she a fool, do you think? I fancied she had a sensible look. I can’t say I’ve ever heard her say anything clever. She doesn’t burst into puns, and she isn’t satirical, you know. But I should have given her credit for good sense. Looks as if she could make a pudding or sew on a button. Good style too. Carries her head well—doesn’t want a bearing-rein. Well, I’ll go and look in at Tattersall’s,

and then go and dress for dinner. I hope these Italian people talk English ?

‘Admirably.’

‘Jolly clever of them, isn’t it ? I never could manage modern languages. I suppose it’s from being over-dosed with the Classics when I was a boy.’

‘And yet I seldom hear you indulge in Greek or Latin,’ remarks Myra, smiling.

‘No ; nothing so caddish as a fellow quoting Plato or Cicero. Only fit for a newspaper man or an Irish member. *Au plaisir.*’ And with this fragment of a modern language, Lord Earlswood departs, to loaf at the great horse-mart for the next hour or so, to smoke a cigar or two, drink a soda-and-brandy or two, yawn over the sporting weeklies, and at eight o’clock reappear in Mrs. Brandreth’s drawing-room, faultlessly arrayed in evening dress of puritanical simplicity—no studs, no chain, no trinket—black and white, like a mourning letter.

Relieved of his lordship’s unenlivening presence, Mrs. Brandreth paces the larger drawing-room thoughtfully. Her eyes shine with a wicked light. Her rival’s misery is very sweet—the wine of life—



sweet almost as that cup which the same rival snatched from her lips.

‘Revenge is almost as good as love,’ she tells herself.

She knows a good deal more about Herman than she has chosen to tell Herman’s wife. She knows that he has left England because his affairs are in confusion, because he is in desperate need of money, and that let him do his uttermost it will go hard with him to stave off ruin. She knows that the pretty house by the river is a perilous abode just now, and she means to make it more perilous if she can. Hatred so deep as hers is not to be satisfied by the temporary severance of husband and wife. She would see them parted for ever. And far away in the dim future, beyond their parting, Hope beckons boldly.

‘He has found out his mistake long ago,’ she tells herself. ‘He comes to me for counsel, he comes to me for amusement. That pretty piece of simplicity wearies him. He loved me first—loved me when his heart was young and fresh and ardent. He will love me last.’

A Pompadour mirror, framed in Sèvres biscuit, stands before the open window in the full bright sunshine. She catches sight of her face in the glass. O, cruel lines which passion and art have wrought there!—art being with her a kind of spurious passion. That one glance at her own image in the searching sunlight reminds her that she is no longer young.

‘But I am famous, and I am rich,’ she tells herself. ‘People say I am handsome still; and in spite of those lines I am not thirty—not too old to be loved again, not too old to be happy.’

‘Mr. Lyndhurst,’ announces the servant; and if the spirit of darkness had been ushered into that amber drawing-room his arrival could not have seemed to Myra more appropriate.

They shake hands with a cordial air—always on the best possible terms, knowing each other so thoroughly, and respecting in each other the highest modern development of the principle of evil.

‘Where have you been hiding yourself all this time? And how well you are looking!’ exclaims Myra in a breath.

‘I have been in Wales.’

‘Indeed! What part of Wales?’

‘Within an hour’s drive of Lochwithian Priory. My doctor recommended the Llandrysak waters as a wholesome tonic. Mrs. Westray’s father has been very civil, and I have enjoyed the sweets of domesticity under his respectable roof.’

‘You are a most extraordinary man.’

‘Extraordinary because I go out of the beaten tracks in search of happiness! I have trodden the dusty high roads in the morning of life, and have had enough of the dust and bustle and sunshine. Afternoon has come, and I prefer the shade of silent woods. I did not think it was in my nature to be as happy as I have been at Lochwithian.’

‘What a pity there should be any impediment to your happiness assuming a permanent form! These glimpses of Paradise must be trying to a man of your temperament,’ says Myra, with a sneer. ‘What do you think of Mr. Westray having run away from domestic felicity?’

‘I heard of it last night at the Agora. Have you any idea as to his reasons for leaving England?’

‘I believe he owes more money than he finds it quite convenient to pay, and has some idea of arranging matters with his creditors more easily from a distance. He said something to me about having raised money by a bill of sale on his furniture; but he seemed to apprehend no immediate danger from that.’

Hamilton Lyndhurst smiles, a slow complacent smile.

‘Yes, I know something about that bill of sale,’ he says.

‘You don’t mean that you—’

‘I know the people who hold it. A bad lot, rather. Foolish fellow, Westray, to put himself in the power of that kind of vermin. But your geniuses will hazard ruin in the future to escape trouble in the present. I think our friend Westray has pretty nearly drained his resources. He has had money in advance from his publisher, I know. Rather bad for poor Mrs. Westray if the bill of sale should be acted upon while he is away.’

‘You mean that it would make her homeless?’

‘Precisely.’

‘She would go back to her father.’

‘Do you think so? Now I believe she is just the woman whose pride would prevent her doing that. Those high-principled strong-minded women have the pride of Lucifer. No, she has married for love, and will stand true to her colours through good or ill; or else—’

‘Or else what?’ asks Myra, as he pauses meditatively.

‘Lose her head, and accept the first haven that offers.’

## CHAPTER II.

‘ Your beauty is no beauty to him now :  
A common chance—right well I know it—pall’d—  
For I know men : nor will you win him back,  
For the man’s love once gone never returns.

\* \* \* \* \*

Why droops my Celia ?  
Thou hast, in place of a base husband, found  
A worthy lover !’

MONDAY morning brings the letter which has been travelling to and fro since Friday—not a long letter or an altogether satisfactory one, but a letter of explanation in some sort, written as if every word had been wrung out of the writer unwillingly.

‘ You will blame me, dearest, I fear, for the step I am taking,’ writes Herman, after a simple announcement of his determination ; ‘ but I have reasons—reasons of a purely business nature—which render the act a wise one. First and foremost, I shall make more money in a few weeks than I could

earn at home. Secondly, I find myself in actual need of change of scene and occupation. My pen flags, my work grows distasteful to me. I want the revivifying influence of active life.

‘I am sorry to say we have not been doing so well this year as I could have wished. The house and stable have run away with more money than I have been able to earn, and we are deeper in debt than I was at all aware till I held a little review of matters the other day. However, we shall tide on somehow, no doubt. Mrs. Brandreth will remit you my share of her profits weekly while I am away ; and although the business is not particularly good at this time of year, there will be no doubt enough money to enable you to carry on the war in my absence. I do not know exactly when she means to close the theatre, but I imagine the season will last some time longer. When I come back we will take counsel together and plan some kind of retrenchment. We might let our house furnished, and live abroad for a year or two. We can at any rate get rid of the carriage and horses, as you proposed. Of course good-natured friends will draw their own conclusions

from our economy, and will say that I have lost my hold upon the public, and that my last books have been failures. I must resign myself to this. After all, what the world says of a man never yet made his finger ache. But how many a heartache the slave of opinion gives himself!

‘It will be wisest and in every way best for you to remain at the Priory while I am away, dearest. You will be safe there from all possibility of annoyance from importunate creditors, should any of mine take it into their heads to be importunate, which I do not anticipate. The Squire and Ruth will be delighted to have you, the little one will wax fat and strong, and you will be happy among your native hills and your faithful old pensioners, to say nothing of your dear Mr. Petherick; while I shall be happy in knowing that your life is sheltered and serene.

‘You shall hear from me as often as possible, and the *Day Star* will give you a detailed account of my adventures. This struggle is more deadly, more appalling, than I can tell you. How small our petty troubles and money difficulties appear before the horrors of scientific warfare. The might and glory



of France, that nation which, a few years ago, seemed prosperous and invincible as Rome under Augustus—nay, seemed like a Colossus to bestride and overshadow Europe, are melting like snow-flakes in the river,

‘A moment seen, then gone for ever.’

‘God bless you, dear one, and remember that, near or far, absent or present, I am ever your fond and faithful husband,

‘HERMAN WESTRAY.’

There is comfort in the letter, for it breathes unchanged affection, and that vague fear which has afflicted Editha in the last two days—the fear that she has suffered some lessening of her husband’s love—is dispelled by his cordial tenderness. Money difficulties are light as thistledown in the faithful wife’s mind. If their need of help were more desperate than she supposes it can be, papa and Ruth would help them. There is a home always for them at Lochwithian. Her own little income—in a worldly woman’s estimation barely enough to pay

the dressmaker—is a barrier between them and want. She will welcome poverty if it brings about a change in their mode of existence—obliges Herman to dispense with clubs and evening parties, reconciles him perhaps to Welsh retirement: that pretty house and garden on the side of the hill, the waterfall sounding his evening lullaby, the skylark's glad carillon awakening him at morn.

She answers her husband's letter lovingly, dutifully; breathes not a word of reproach, dwells not upon her own griefs, or the sharp pang of disappointment which made her coming home so bitter.

‘I should have stayed at Lochwithian had your letter reached me in time, dear Herman,’ she writes, after tenderest entreaties that he will be careful of his precious person, run no risk that can possibly be avoided, shun damp beds and shot and shell; ‘but as I have returned I shall remain here, and see what I can do in my small way towards the lessening of our household expenses. I have given Files a month's wages and sent her about her business, for I have discovered that she is a most extravagant person, and has been cheating us systematically all

along. She was quite indignant at having to go, and said she had worked like a galley-slave for us, and that she had never been treated with such ingratitude. It would be a warning to her never again to enter the service of low people who write books. Selina has told me an immense deal about her, which if true is most shocking, and it is a pity Selina had not the courage to tell me while Fies was with us. Mary Ann I have also despatched, as we can manage very well without a parlourmaid : especially if we give fewer dinner-parties in future. The horses and carriages you will of course sell directly you come home. Believe me I shall not feel the loss of them. Nothing would delight me so much as to let our house and live near papa and Ruth for a year or two ; but if the idea of life among our hills is disagreeable to you, I should be quite resigned to living abroad ; indeed you know that I have travelled so little that a continental life would have all the charm of novelty for me. The narrowing of our circumstances would not distress me in the least, dearest, did I not fear—no, I will be candid, and say did I not know—that my careless

housekeeping has impoverished you. I have trusted too much to strange servants; believing that they would be as honest as the dear good creatures who have lived half their lives at the Priory. Ruth has opened my eyes to my folly, and I mean to be a much better housekeeper in future. She has found me a good honest girl as cook, and I hope when you return you will find our expenditure considerably reduced.'

Thus cheerily, affectionately, dutifully, writes the wife, without one complaint of the loneliness which weighs very heavily upon her in these bright autumn days, when every one—including the baker's wife and children and the butcher's small family—is deserting dusty Fulham for shingly beaches and fair stretches of golden sand upon the south-eastern coast, for Margate's crowded jetty, or Pegwell's shrimpy bay. Very long are the days at Bridge-end House, despite Mrs. Westray's endeavours to find respite and forgetfulness from her favourite authors in Herman's study, where she dusts every book, and arranges every nick-nack with loving care. Even that inexhaustible delight, the baby,

palls upon her a little in these long days. There are moments when her spirits are not in tune with that glad young babbler, when she has not vitality enough to be a horse, or an elephant, or a wolf, as the exigences of the game demand ; when she lacks even power to tell that elementary story of the boy who was naughty and rebelled against his nurse, or the boy who was good and was largely rewarded with sponge-cake.

Thinking of Herman, fearing for Herman, wondering about Herman—these are the intellectual exercises which fill her empty days. She will not drive in the Park, for she has an uncomfortable feeling that the carriage belongs rather to her husband's creditors than to herself, and that she has no right to the enjoyment of it ; she fancies that angry tradesmen may point at her as she passes by with her high-stepping horses, shining golden-bay in the autumn sunlight. Even the house accounts have fallen into arrear within the last few months. Weekly payments have been superseded by occasional cheques on account, and the result of this system is a heavy balance against Mr. Westray in the books

of butcher and grocer, dairyman and baker; to say nothing of the corn-merchant, who has been rather troublesome of late, and has called more than once to inquire when Mr. Westray will be home.

On the last of these visits, as he puts his question in a loud and angry tone, the study-door opens, and Editha appears, pale and anxious-looking. That sweet sad face is not a reassuring countenance for a creditor to behold.

‘Mr. Westray will be home in a few weeks at latest, Mr. Mincer,’ she says quietly. ‘I am sorry you should have to wait for your money.’

‘So am I, ma’am,’ answers the man gloomily, but in a less savage tone than he had used to the maid just now. ‘I’ve got a heavy bill to make up, and I want Mr. Westray’s money for it. I thought I was safe enough in letting his account run—that my money was as good as if it was in the bank. But money in the bank’s no use if you can’t get it when you want it. That’s where it is, you see, ma’am. Your coachman sends round to me for two quarter of oats and half a load of hay this morning,

as cool as you please ; but I ain't a-going to supply nothink more without the money.'

' You shall have the money, then, Mr. Mincer. The horses must be fed while we have them. You shall be paid ready money for everything in future. If you'll send me a bill with the things that my coachman ordered it shall be paid on delivery.'

' Well, ma'am you can't say fairer than that, as far as it goes,' replies the corn-merchant, softened if not satisfied. ' But I should be very glad of fifty pound on account to help meet that bill. *My* creditors won't wait. It's a dull time of the year, too; some of the best of my customers has sent their horses out to grass while they're at the seaside. And I make no doubt this war will send up the price of oats awful. And when oats goes up horses is put down—leastways that's my experience.'

Home without Herman, and with this shadow of debt hanging over it like a pall, is home no longer. Editha's spirits sink to their lowest ebb. She is full of fears for Herman in the present. Cheerily as she writes to him, she is not without fear for him

in the future. She knows not what ruin may be descending upon him, what power exasperated creditors may have to assail and injure him, what disgrace insolvency may not involve—his honour, his good name, perhaps, for ever forfeited by the imprudence of the last two years.

Of poverty in the abstract this fond wife has no terror. She can fancy no lot sweeter than humble fortune with the man she loves—an existence narrowed by narrow means to simplest domesticity; a life spent among the hills and woods and quiet villages of Wales, far from all that makes life costly. But the shame of debts unpaid is horrible to her mind. That brief interview with the disappointed corn-merchant was sharpest agony.

Her two servants, the nursemaid Jane and housemaid Selina, behave very well at this juncture, as servants generally do in time of trouble. They know that a cloud lowers upon the house, and are curiously gentle and sympathetic, compassionating the young mistress who has never spoken an unkind word to them, and secretly angry with their master for his absence in this time of embarrassment. Selina even



deigns to keep the kitchen clean unassisted by a char-woman.

So time slips on for ten days. Herman's letters appear almost daily in the *Day Star*, full of life and sparkle, graphic description, and sharp observation, which delight the readers of the great journal. Editha reads them with tears in her eyes. How clever he is! what vigour, what vivacity in his writing! And how happy he seems amidst the bustle and excitement of war—how unconscious of danger, how indifferent to deprivation!

Ten days, which seem like ten weeks. Editha has hardly stirred from the house since her Sunday-afternoon call at Mrs. Brandreth's. A little walk in the garden with baby is her only exercise. The leaves are beginning to change colour already; a few of the earliest fall across her path as she walks. Steamers crowded with happy Cockneys come aground in the twilight, or go puffing and panting triumphantly by, as if they never had been known to get aground in their lives and were incapable of doing it. The noble expanse of Thames mud has a melancholy look at low tide. The lights of Putney twinkle less

cheerily than of old. Dismal hour betwixt day and night, when it is too light for lamps or candles, and the evening gray is peopled with saddest thoughts.

It is in this dreary pause between light and darkness that the first note of ruin sounds in Editha's ears. She is walking in the garden after her solitary tea-dinner, looking hopelessly at the darkening river and thinking of the good days gone—the first spring and summer of her wedded life, when the world seemed full of joy. A stealthy-sounding footstep startles her, and she turns suddenly. It is only Selina, coming towards her with a cautious step and a scared expression of countenance.

‘O, if you please, ma'am, there's a gentleman and a man wants to see you; and I'm afraid it's something wrong, for they said something about taking possession of the place.’

‘What do you mean, Selina?’

‘Well, I'm afraid, ma'am, they're something in the way of bailiffs. My last master but one was subject to bailiffs; they used to come in once in three months as regular as the water-rate; and these have azackly the same look. I don't know whether it's the

cut of their clothes, or the way they wears their 'ats, or the oiliness of their complexions, but you may pretty well know 'em anywheres.'

Editha has a vague idea that bailiffs are the bandogs of the fiend Debt, but hasn't the faintest notion as to the working of the institution.

She goes quietly to meet her doom, whatever it may be. In the dining-room she finds a large and florid gentleman, with a nose, a beard, two black side-curls of the Newgate-knocker pattern, and a demonstrative watch-chain. This gentleman is seated in an easy attitude on the corner of the dining-table. His humble companion stands aloof, hat in hand. The hat is greasy of aspect, and overflows with a large red-cotton handkerchief. This lowly follower of the doomsman has a deprecatory expression of countenance, as of one accustomed to be despised—one to whom the process of being kicked out of doors is not positively unknown.

The florid gentleman with the watch-chain is elaborately civil. He explains in a *débonnaire* way the motive of his intrusion. There is a little bill of sale on Mr. Westray's furniture—quite a friendly

thing; but even between friends business is business, and must be arranged in a business-like manner. The amount is eleven hundred and odd pounds, and in the event of Mrs. Westray not being ready to pay that sum, the *débonnaire* gentleman is here to take possession of the aforesaid furniture by his minion, the man with the sleek hat.

‘I think it will be more agreeable for all parties for me to leave the man,’ says the pleasant-spoken gentleman. ‘It will give you and Mr. Westray time to look about you. You’ll find Cruncher the quietest creature. Give him a corner to sit in—the back-kitchen, or the scullery if you like; let him smoke his pipe; give him his victuals regular—he’s rather a heavy feeder, Cruncher—and he’ll be as happy as the day is long. There isn’t a more harmless fellow going. You won’t know he’s in the house.’

The sheriff’s officer having thus inducted his representative, takes a gracious leave of Mrs. Westray, whose beauty has evidently impressed his sensitive nature. He lingers a little to admire the Pompeian dining-room, and is elaborately civil, with a shade of friendliness which offends Editha’s pride. She tells

Selina to show the gentleman out in the midst of his panegyric on her taste in upholstery.

‘Pity to break up such a tasty place!’ he says; ‘but no doubt Mr. Westray will find it easy to settle this little affair. A gentleman so popular with the public can’t have much difficulty in finding a thousand or so. Nice thing that last play of his at the Frivolity! I went to see it three times. That Mrs. Brandreth’s a stunner!’

Editha turns her back upon the man with a shudder. She feels as if some particularly loathsome member of the flat-headed snake tribe had crawled into her once-happy home. The door closes on the well-dressed executor of the law; but the humbler bandog remains, still standing meekly just inside the dining-room door, sleeking that oleaginous hat of his with his moist palm.

‘O Selina, what are we to do?’ exclaims Editha hopelessly. If the officers of doom had come to convey her by water to her Majesty’s Tower, to languish in some stony cell till she was brought out to die, she could feel no deeper despair. ‘What are we to do with that horrid man?’ she asks piteously.

‘Lor, ma’am, you needn’t trouble about him,’ replies Selina cheeringly; ‘leave him to me. *They’re* manageable enough, poor things! I’ll give him a bit of cold Irish stew for supper, and let him sit with me and Jane. He looks a harmless creature, though he might be cleaner.’

‘I don’t suppose there is any harm in him,’ says Editha, almost in tears; ‘but to think of his being in the same house with baby.’

Selina tells the law’s minion to follow her downstairs. She speaks to him sharply and authoritatively, as if he had been some dilapidated old person hired to clean the boots, and he obeys submissively, feeling himself very low down upon the social ladder.

Editha goes up to the nursery, and has her boy’s crib brought down to her own room. The nurse can make up a bed for herself in the adjacent dressing-room, so as to be close at hand. If that shabby old man lurking in the basement were a member of the vampire tribe, and likely to prowl up-stairs after midnight intent on sucking her infant’s blood, Mrs. Westray could hardly dread him more than she does. She is a little more easy in her mind when young

Herman's crib is established beside her bed, the baby lips moving softly in placid sleep. With the door of her bedroom locked on the inside, and the nurse keeping guard in the dressing-room, she feels that her darling is safe. This is her citadel; here even debt can hardly assail her.

She looks round at the bright pretty furniture with a sigh. To think that any one else—some low common man, perhaps—should hold a legal instrument giving him power to seize upon these things, to devastate this tasteful home, to send his grimy custodian into her house, there to squat toad-like till the law's delay be ended and the hour of ruin come! What is to be done? she asks herself by and by, when her spirits are a little calmer. That good girl Selina has brought her a cup of tea, and has comforted her with the assurance that the man in possession is a very decent sort of person, and is making himself agreeable down-stairs.

‘I’ve made him up a bed in the housekeeper’s room, ma’am; for I thought you wouldn’t like to have him up-stairs,’ says the thoughtful Selina.

‘How good you are!’ is all Editha can reply.

‘Lor, ma’am, I can’t bear to see you in trouble! Such a kind mistress as you’ve been, never interfering, nor nothing! I’m sure I should have upped and told you about Mrs. Files giving away the victuals, if I’d thought you couldn’t afford to be cheated; but seeing you and master so careless like, I fancied it didn’t matter. And it’s so unpleasant for one servant to tell upon another.’

‘You are a good girl, Selina, and I hope you’ll stay with me wherever we go. We must be more careful in future; for you see we are poor people. My income is a very small one, and your master has to work for his living.’

‘Writing books,’ says Selina, with a dubious air; ‘that seems easy work enough, as long as the thoughts come into your head. But it must make his hand ache holding the pen so long, I should think. I’ve often wondered he doesn’t have an amanuiscence.’

Trouble makes the kindly Selina a shade familiar, but she means well. She runs down-stairs to fetch nurse’s supper, that custodian of infancy being no more permitted to leave her sleeping charge than if



she were set to watch an alembic in which carbon was crystallising into diamond.

Editha stands at the window looking at the moon-lit river—very beautiful now—shore and tree and tower all glorified by the moon. She tries to think what is to be done—how money is to be found to pay this unknown creditor who holds dominion over her household treasures. To let the house furnished, or to remove the furniture to a smaller and less expensive house, would be only retrenchment, and she could submit to the change without a pang. But to see these goods and chattels taken forcible possession of by a creditor, would mean ignominy.

Upwards of eleven hundred pounds ! Can she ask her father for such a sum ? No, that is impossible. She knows that the Squire finds it as much as he can do to maintain that large household at the Priory ; to find money for repairs and necessary improvements ; to keep his estate and all appertaining thereto in fit order, to be transferred by and by to his eldest son. He has to help his sons, who have large families and small professional incomes. No, pride and good feeling alike forbid any appeal to her father. She has

married the husband of her choice ; she has disappointed the Squire's dearest hopes by that marriage. Only the other day he spoke regretfully, reproachfully even, of her refusal of Vivian Hetheridge. No, she cannot ask her father for eleven hundred pounds, even if there were any likelihood of his having such a sum at his disposal. Ruth's income is like her own, something less than two hundred a year from trust money under her mother's settlement, not to be anticipated or disposed of ; so there can be no help from Ruth. These two people make Mrs. Westray's little world. She has no one else to look to.

‘ Perhaps Herman will be able to raise the money quite easily when he comes home,’ she thinks, more hopefully.

She writes him a long letter that night, telling him what has happened, and entreating him to return as soon as possible. She has thoughts of telegraphing to him, but on deliberation prefers the slower mode of a letter. A telegram with such unpleasant news might be too severe a shock. She would spare him pain if possible.

The night drags itself through, sleepless for

Editha. She lies broad awake, thinking of these new difficulties—money difficulties, unknown to her hitherto. Morning comes with its garish light and the accustomed household sounds. She rises a little later than usual, too hopeless almost to face the day's dull round. Baby has been crawling over her more or less since six o'clock, playing at wild beasts on the pillow, and making a lion's den of the curtains. Selina brings her a cup of tea, and the agreeable tidings that the 'old gentleman' has slept very well, and has eaten the best part of a half-quartern loaf and two Yarmouth bloaters for breakfast.

Anon comes the excitement of baby's bath, with various aquatic and acrobatic performances attendant thereupon, splashings and climbings and somersaults on his nurse's lap; baby's breakfast; and then nurse and baby sally forth for a promenade in the episcopal garden; baby enthroned in his perambulator; nurse in a newly-starched gown, and something brilliant in the bonnet line. Editha is alone, and will be alone till baby's dinner-time. She goes down to Herman's study, her chosen retreat, and tries to find solace in his books.

She opens a volume of Sir Thomas Browne, and reads listlessly for a little while, and anon seeks comfort in one of Taylor's sermons. How calmly they philosophised, these sages and clerics of old, as if trouble or sorrow never came near them, save as a subject for meditation, a thesis to write upon ! Did they ever know real heartache ? she wonders. These meditators upon tombstones, these anatomisers of melancholy, or even this prince of eloquence, the Cambridge barber's son, Jeremy Taylor, who tries to philosophise the sting out of sorrow and death. To-day, in her own depth of anguish, it seems to Editha as if these sages were chiefly intent on the exhibition of their learning and the stately march of their sentences.

'Let me read some one who has suffered,' she says impatiently, closing Burton's famous treatise—one of the books that always lies on Herman's writing-table, side by side with Montaigne and La Bruyère—and taking down Charles Lamb. The tenderness, the bright humour soothe her. For nearly an hour she forgets her cares. How gaily he wrote, whose life was so full of sadness ! what sweetness he drew

from smallest pleasures! How exquisite his appreciation of tranquil domestic joys! A choice old book picked up at a stall, a china teacup, a friendly rubber, an act of gracious unpretending charity, an exercise of unselfish hospitality to a needy acquaintance. Sweet Elia, the world gave thee so little, and thou hast given the world so much!

The ringing of the hall-door bell startles Editha from the enjoyment of her book. She hears a masculine voice, and then Selina opens the study-door and announces Mr. Lyndhurst.

Editha's pale face crimsones as he enters. Not for worlds would she have one of Herman's friends aware of his degradation, and she has a dim idea that the presence of the man in possession must make itself felt in the house a kind of social malaria.

'I am lucky in finding you at home on such a fine day,' says Mr. Lyndhurst, after the usual greetings.

'Not especially lucky; I am almost always at home,' answers Editha.

Mr. Lyndhurst remembers a certain familiar story of a peerless matron spinning among her maids when

the fatal visitor came. Domesticity does not always mean safety.

‘Westray not yet returned from the seat of war?’

‘Not yet,’ she answers, with a sigh.

‘And you have no definite announcement of his coming?’

‘No; but I expect him soon.’

‘Indeed. I should have thought he would have stayed to see the upshot of this business, and I fear it will hang long on hand. It must be interesting work. Do you remember my telling you he was likely to accept the *Day Star* people’s offer, when we were in Wales? You thought he would not, but I was right, you see. I knew him best.’

‘Perhaps you knew his necessities better than I did,’ replies Editha, with dignity. That anybody should pretend to be her superior in knowledge of her husband’s character is not to be endured.

‘Well, yes, perhaps that was it. I knew that he had difficulties to contend with just at that time.’

‘I am glad that he went,’ says Editha cheerfully. She feels that to seem despondent would be to betray the secret of that Frankenstein in the basement.

‘He writes in excellent spirits. The change will do him good; and when he comes back, I have reason to hope that he will consent to our going to live in the country. There is a house near Lochwithian—I showed it to you one day, by the bye—which I have set my heart upon making our home.’

‘For a fortnight?’

‘For always. With an occasional visit to London, of course.’

‘My dear Mrs. Westray, your husband would be melancholy mad after the first month. He has not what Bulwer Lytton calls the rural temperament. He is dependent upon society for his pleasures. He likes books well enough as a means, but learning is not the end of his life. He likes men and women better than books, and is more an observer than a thinker. His well-spring of invention would run dry if you took him away from the clubs; his fountain of imagination would cease to flow if you shut him out of the theatres. In a word, he is not a literary creator, but a literary photographer.’

‘I am sorry his friend should rank him so low,’ exclaims Editha, wounded.

‘ My candour offends you, yet I meant to praise. What can be a happier exercise of genius than to supply the want of one’s age ? The desire of our age is to see itself in a glass. We have exploded the historical novel, the legendary novel, the romantic novel. We don’t want Greeks or Romans, Saxons or Crusaders. We want ourselves—our literature, to please us, must be about ourselves ; our plays, to amuse us, must represent ourselves ; our pictures, to be popular, must show us ourselves. Imagine a new Southey sitting down to write *Roderick* or *Thalaba* ; imagine a publisher’s feelings on having the poem offered him. Your husband respects the inclination of his age, and writes of men and women he knows. Take him away from his models, and you cause the decay of his art. He will be writing from memory instead of following the inspiration of the hour.’

‘ Perhaps you are right,’ replies Editha, with a sigh ; ‘ but I am not ready to admit as much. I should like Herman to turn his back upon this human kaleidoscope, London Society, and draw upon his imagination. If Scott had given us nothing but



life in Princes-street, Edinburgh, he would not have held a large place in our minds. And then I have Herman's health and happiness to consider as well as his success as a writer. He was looking ill when I left him to go to Lochwithian, and I know he has been overworked.'

'There may be other causes as well as overwork,' says Lyndhurst thoughtfully. 'I believe Westray has been worried of late.'

'He has had anxieties about money matters, perhaps,' says Editha, with a troubled look.

'I was not thinking of those.'

'Of what then? O Mr. Lyndhurst, pray speak plainly! If you have the knowledge of anxieties which my husband, from mistaken kindness, conceals from me, do not hesitate to let me know the worst. Nothing could make me more unhappy than to know I had not shared his trouble.'

'There may be trouble which it is impossible for you to share—trouble which I have no right to speak about in your hearing. Do not draw me on to say too much, Mrs. Westray. Respect for you, sympathy with you, may make me false to my friend.'

‘That cannot possibly be. I have no interest apart from my husband.’

‘Of course not ; let us say no more,’ replies Lyndhurst, with an embarrassed manner which puzzles and troubles Editha.

‘Now I know that you are hiding something from me, Mr. Lyndhurst,’ she exclaims eagerly ; ‘I can see it in your face and manner. Something has happened since I left London ; you know of some trouble that has come upon my husband, or that threatens him. If it is a money trouble only, perhaps I know as much as you ; but if it is anything else, anything worse—’

‘Come, then, I’ll trust you,’ replies Lyndhurst, as if moved by a sudden gush of honest feeling, ‘at the risk of seeming a traitor to my friend. Yet I shall be no traitor, for he has never confided in me. All I know is the result of observation and of accident : your husband is in danger.’

‘In what danger ?’ cries Editha, alarmed.

‘In danger of sinning against you beyond recall ; in danger of bartering home, peace, happiness, honour, for an unprincipled woman’s smiles ; in danger of

delivering himself over, bound hand and foot, to his first love, Myra Brandreth.'

'His first love!'

She repeats the words slowly, pale as death, looking at Hamilton Lyndhurst with horror's steadfast gaze.

'His first love!' she says again. 'He never loved her, never knew her till she acted in his plays. He cares nothing for her—except as a clever actress, able to carry out his ideas.'

'Did he not—does he not? O Mrs. Westray, you have indeed been hoodwinked! Did he not tell you? Well, I suppose it's the fashion to leave these things dark: yet I thought when a man married it was incumbent upon him to let his wife know something of his past.'

'I knew that Herman was engaged to a woman who was false to him.'

'But you did not know that the jilt was Mrs. Brandreth. He did not tell you the Devonshire idyl in full—did not tell you that he and Colonel Clitheroe's daughter were children together, plighted lovers before they were out of their teens, and that adverse cir-

cumstances, or in other words empty pockets, alone parted them. Those half confidences are a mistake. Had you known all, your woman's wit would have found some means of keeping him out of reach of his first love—false to him, but never forgetful of him.'

'Had I known all, I should have been no more afraid of Mrs. Brandreth's influence on my husband than I am now,' replies Editha, struggling proudly with that aching heart of hers.

'My dear Mrs. Westray, that is what every true woman says at the first blush. But if I did not think you superior both in sense and courage to the generality of women, I should never have ventured to approach this most painful subject. I like Westray, and I don't like to see him going headlong to his ruin. I revere you, and I cannot stand by to see you wronged. I am a man of the world, and I look at these things from a worldly point of view. Your husband's too evident devotion to Mrs. Brandreth does not horrify me as it would your brother the clergyman. He would be for going straight off to the lawyers and asking for a judicial separation. I look upon the whole thing as a social mistake—one

of those follies which shipwreck lives, because there is seldom any one with courage to speak plainly either to the sinner or the sinned against. I have spoken very plainly to your husband, but he has laughed at my advice. I take a bolder course now, and venture to call your attention to this rock ahead which threatens your domestic peace.'

'I am willing to believe that you mean well by this interference, Mr. Lyndhurst,' Editha replies calmly, 'but I must tell you that I consider your remarks as insulting to me as they are to my husband. If I have lost my hold upon his affection, which I do not for a moment believe, I doubt whether any advice of yours would enable me to regain it; I would rather trust to my own heart, my own instinct, in such a case as that. My husband's liking for Mrs. Brandreth's society results only from his love of dramatic art; she is able to advise him about the construction of his plays, her technical knowledge is of use to him—'

'And out of sheer gratitude he writes her love-letters,' interrupts Lyndhurst scornfully. 'Mrs. Westray, I cannot see you so blinded by affection

for a man who at his best is unworthy of you. Think me cruel, dishonourable—what you will: I must speak plainly. I picked up the torn half of a letter in Myra Brandreth's boudoir the day before I left London for Wales, and kept it, half disposed to show it you, yet doubtful whether it were not better to keep the secret. But when I see you so deluded, so confident in a bad man—'

'Show me the letter, sir, and spare me your criticism. When my husband's honour is in question, I had rather judge for myself.'

'You will forgive me for the pain I inflict?'

'Forgive you? Do you suppose I think of *you* for a moment? Give me the letter.'

He takes a letter from his breast-pocket, selecting it from half a dozen others, and hands it to her slowly, with a slight hesitation of manner, as if at the last moment he were doubtful whether he should let her see it.

There is the thick square envelope directed in the hand she knows so well, and inside it half a sheet of Bath post, torn unevenly from the letter of which it has formed a part.

For some moments Editha can hardly see the words. She turns abruptly away from Mr. Lyndhurst, unwilling that he should discover how weak she is, and then, steadying herself with an effort, reads the following lines in her husband's hand :

‘ So, after weighing all circumstances deliberately, I can see only one chance of happiness for me and you, and that lies in reunion. We were foolish when we parted ; we should be worse than foolish to remain asunder now that we have discovered, once for all, how utterly dependent we are upon each other for happiness. Without you life for me loses all zest, all charm ; ambition is a word of no meaning. Consider this, dearest, and decide. You need fear no repetition of past mistakes in the future. I know my own heart now, and know that it cannot change. It is yours now, as it has been yours always. Every other dream was delusive. I shall go away in order that you may make your election deliberately. If you decide, as I hope and believe you will decide, you can join me in my exile, the time and place to be agreed upon when your heart has spoken as to our future.’

This is all. The lines fill only half the page. There is neither signature nor date.

‘This letter to which you seem to attach so much importance is unsigned,’ Editha says, after slowly reading those cruel lines, which seem to her like the death-warrant of her happiness.

‘I don’t think any signature is necessary for its identification,’ replies Lyndhurst coolly; ‘there can be no doubt as to the identity of the writer.’

‘I am not so sure of that. People write so much alike nowadays.’

‘Sublime hypocrisy,’ thinks Lyndhurst; ‘she will pretend to believe black is white rather than condemn her husband.’

‘However, I will show my husband the letter when he comes home, and ask him how it came to be written. I have no doubt I shall find it means something very different from what you suppose.’

‘When he comes home,’ echoes Lyndhurst, with a sneer, dropping the tone of sympathising friend and honest open-minded counsellor. ‘Do you believe, in the face of that letter, that he will ever come



home? Can you doubt that this war-correspondent business was a planned thing—a subtle scheme to make escape easy; to bridge over an awkward interval and lessen the scandal of his desertion of you? Mrs. Brandreth will join him when her theatre closes; she cannot afford to leave London sooner. To-night is the last of the season, by the bye. She will be free to-morrow.’

Editha listens horror-stricken. Delirium could imagine no wilder dream than this waking agony. Coldly, quietly, in those tranquil legato tones, Hamilton Lyndhurst makes manifest her husband’s perfidy. He has gone back to his first love. His heart has never really belonged to his wife. This Myra Brandreth, clever, brilliant, fascinating, famous, has never lost her hold upon him.

Can such infamy be? She looks down at that shameless letter—that bold avowal of guilty passion—and the answer is obvious. His own hand condemns him.

‘Mrs. Brandreth’s life has been spotless hitherto,’ she says, striving to be calm, stifling that bitter cry of anguish which is ready to burst from her lips.

‘She has preserved her good name in the midst of temptation. I cannot believe that she will disgrace herself by a shameful flight, even,’ she adds slowly, recovering self-possession in some degree, ‘even if this letter of Herman’s means what it seems to mean, which I do not for a moment admit.’

‘My dear Mrs. Westray, if that letter be not evidence, I don’t know what evidence is. As for Mrs. Brandreth, she has had very good cards to play, and has played them remarkably well. She has won distinction and made money; she has repelled Earlswood’s advances, and yet kept him her adorer. But you forget the power of love. Open the floodgates of passion, and worldly wisdom is swept away by the torrent. Love that stops to reason or counts the cost of a sacrifice is no love at all.’

‘If my husband is false to me, if his love has been alienated or he has never loved me, I cannot discuss my sorrow with you, Mr. Lyndhurst. I suppose I ought to thank you for having opened my eyes to this most bitter truth, but—’

Her voice trembles, the words are stifled by a convulsive throbbing in her throat; she makes one

heroic effort to control her grief, and then breaks down altogether, and sobs aloud.

‘Mrs. Westray—Editha,’ says Lyndhurst, pale with suppressed passion. Vile as the man is he pities her—pities her as he would pity his horse or dog in mortal agony, his heart wrung as if by absolute pain. ‘Editha, if this man had been false only, I should have spared you this revelation; but he has been heartless as well. He leaves you hemmed in with difficulties, leaves you under the shadow of disgrace. Yes, I know all; the news of our friends’ troubles fly on the wings of the wind; every one in your husband’s circle knows. This house is no fitting shelter for you, a shelter from which you may be driven at any hour. And he leaves you homeless, penniless—’

‘That is not true,’ interrupts Editha haughtily. ‘He has left me amply provided with ready money.’

‘But not with money to pay his debts.’

‘That may have been impossible.’

‘No doubt, and he planned his flight accordingly. He has known for some time that his difficulties were approaching a crisis, and he considered that crisis

the fittest occasion for breaking free from all bonds, matrimonial as well as social.'

'I will not hear his conduct discussed; I will not allow motives to be ascribed to him. Even if I know him to be a sinner, I will not accept your judgment of his sin.'

'But you must, you shall, hear me out,' returns Lyndhurst, bending over her with a look whose intensity startles her with a sudden terror. There is meaning in that look which even her innocence cannot misunderstand. Passion burns in those dark eyes and clouds that stern brow. 'I came here to save you from humiliation, to offer you true love instead of sham love—the love of a man who would peril all that men hold highest to win one smile from you. Editha, I have loved you from the first; your noble face flashed upon me like a revelation more than two years ago. I have lived a new life since then, for my life has had a purpose. I have watched and waited for this hour, knowing that, soon or late, it must come. You have not understood me; you have been as blind to my love as you have been to your husband's growing indifference, his preference

for another. It is well that you should know both at once. I love you as no woman—even the best and loveliest—is loved more than once in her life; love you steadfastly, unselfishly, unalterably. Granted that my past life has not been blameless, yet it is no profligate's fleeting passion that I offer you, but a strong man's awakening to pure and perfect love. Trust your future to me, my beloved, and it shall be the brightest destiny that love and wealth ever made for the idol of a man's heart. Our modern law makes release from an unhappy marriage possible. Trust yourself to me, dearest, and in a few months I may call you wife. Till that blessed day comes I ask only to be your champion and defender, your slave to obey and honour your lightest wish.'

Editha hears him to the end, hears him with a blank stare of amazement, which changes slowly to a disdainful smile.

'Is this *all* you have to say?' she asks at last, with provoking calmness.

'I could plead my cause to the end of time, but all is told when I tell you I am your slave,' he an-

swers with an uneasy smile. That deliberate question of Editha's is worse than the most stormy repulse. Her tones, her looks alike pronounce the fatal truth. He has made not the faintest impression on her heart. The fool loves her fickle husband still.

Mrs. Westray rings the bell. Happily the faithful Selina, now maid-of-all-work, does not happen to have her hands entangled in a floury pudding, or to be washing dishes at a greasy sink, and therefore appears promptly.

'The door, Selina,' says Editha. Indignation has stifled grief. There is hardly a trace of tears upon the pale proud face.

Selina opens the hall-door, distant about two yards from that of the study, and Hamilton Lyndhurst, the millionaire, the invincible, the Rochester of the Stock Exchange, knows himself ignominiously dismissed.

He strolls up Fulham's old-fashioned High-street with an imperturbable countenance, but the vulture is at work within. Never before has he set his heart upon any prize and failed to win it. He has aimed high this time, it is true, but he has been patient,

and deems himself worthy of reward. Anger for the moment is dominant over every other feeling. The hardest words in his vocabulary are not bitter enough for the woman who has scorned him.

‘I am not beaten yet,’ he tells himself. ‘Love is never so strong as when it goes hand in hand with revenge. I will trample her pride in the dust. She shall be the sovereign lady of my life, or husbandless, homeless, nameless, and degraded.’

### CHAPTER III.

‘I have lived long enough, having seen one thing, that love hath an end.’

THE revelation of Hamilton Lyndhurst’s baseness is a shock from which Editha does not easily recover. She has trusted him and believed in him as her husband’s friend—the kindly visitor whose presence has brought cheerfulness to her fireside. She has liked him, and Ruth has liked him, and been solaced by his genius. She remembers those placid hours at Lochwithian with a shudder, feeling as if she had cherished a serpent unawares. Her womanly pride is outraged by the idea that any man—the most daring—should presume to speak as Hamilton Lyndhurst has spoken to her.

‘Do I seem the kind of woman to listen to such a proposal?’ she asks herself. ‘I, Herman’s wife?’

But deeper than this natural shame, more bitter than outraged purity, is the fact of Herman’s falsehood. That changes life and the world. Hope has



fled for ever. How petty, how transient appear all her previous cares when weighed against this overwhelming sorrow! To know that she has lost his love, or never really possessed it, were bitter enough, but far worse, for a lofty mind, is the knowledge that the man she loves is treacherous, false, and cowardly; that he has abandoned her in the hour of trouble, leaving for her the burden of debt, poverty, and disgrace, while he woos another to share his shameful exile.

‘I could have endured beggary with him without a murmur!’ she exclaims piteously. And then again and again she pores over that hideous page which tells his treachery. Words so deliberate, so audacious in their infamy. Not one syllable of self-upbraiding, not one gush of pity for his forsaken wife.

‘Yet he would hardly have written my name in such a letter,’ she thinks, with a touch of pride. ‘I ought to thank him for having spared me such an insult.’

If she could, by any straining of her senses, think this paper a forgery; if she could believe that the words had any other meaning than their obvious

significance, she would too gladly take refuge in that belief. She would doubt in spite of herself, if there were room for doubt. But there is none. The hand is Herman's. She knows every trick of his writing as well as she knows her own face in the glass. The words will bear only one interpretation.

Selina, coming in with a luncheon tray, is startled by her mistress's white face.

'Lor, mum, how gashly pale you do look, to be sure! I hope that gentleman didn't bring you no bad news.'

'He told me that people know of our disgrace already. That seems hard.'

'Meaning the elderly gentleman down-stairs? Lor, mum, you needn't go to fret about that. Bailiffs are common enough. My last master but one thought no more of a man in possession than of the chimney-sweep. He used to come a'most as regular.'

Baby comes home at this juncture, fresh and blooming after a long morning out of doors, and Editha has to assist at the young gentleman's dinner. He has lately been promoted to the dignity of a

mutton-chop, instead of the beef-teas and panadas of infancy, and to cut up this chop into minutest portions, to watch the child dispose of the same, and to amuse him while he dines, have been hitherto Mrs. Westray's most agreeable occupations. To-day the wounded heart refuses to be comforted even by baby. The nurse is dismissed to her leisurely dinner in the kitchen, the mother performs her customary duties; but the task is done mechanically. The child looks up at her with vague wonder in his large round eyes. He misses the tender voice that has been wont to discourse sweet nonsense to him. He stares at his mother fixedly for a few moments, and then, scared by her rigid countenance, bursts into a dismal howl.

That cry recalls Editha to her duty. She clasps the little fellow to her breast, and hot tears rain down upon him.

'My darling, my precious one, my fatherless baby!' she sobs. And then composing herself, sets to work to console and reassure the little one, and anon woos him to the discussion and enjoyment of his mutton-chop.

The baby's love is sweet to this young mother even in her despair, but not a healing balm for those aching wounds of hers. He loves her, this little one, she thinks, almost wonderingly; for it seems somewhat strange to her that she should inspire love in any one, having failed to keep Herman's affection—failed though she has given all things, failed though she has well-nigh fallen into the sin of idolatry.

She has her father's calm easy-going affection still, and Ruth's deep love. Are not these things something? Alas, her home life, all the joy and peace of her days before she knew Herman, seem to her far away—almost too remote for memory, as if they had belonged to her in a different state of being! She can draw no comfort from the thought of home and home-love to-day.

Will Ruth and the Squire come to know of Herman's falsehood? That question presents itself to Editha's mind as a new horror. How long shall she be able to hide his degradation—to keep the secret of his guilt? Not long, she fears. Those who love her so well will be curious about her fate.

They will discover her husband's desertion, and she will have to endure their anger against him, their scornful wonder at his baseness.

Every day will add to her burden. For such a grief as hers there is no comforter but Death.

Even this afternoon come fresh worries, small annoyances, like the carrion flies that sting some maimed wretch broken on the wheel. The neighbouring traders have found out somehow that the storm has burst on Bridge-end House. They send in their little accounts, and wait for answers to their applications. They are insolent and importunate. Summonses come fluttering down, like the big drops that fall before a tempest—water-rates, poor-rates, gas-accounts. Though Mr. and Mrs. Westray have spent so much ready money, they seem in debt for everything.

Editha's horror of the house grows upon her as these assaults become more numerous, and she finally determines on flight. She will take nurse and baby with her, and retire to some quiet little lodging up at Wimbledon, where they may live at least unassailed by insolent creditors, where she will

feel herself secure from the possibility of any farther intrusion on the the part of Mr. Lyndhurst. No one but Selina shall know the secret of her retreat.

She consults that faithful girl as to the step, and Selina concurs in its advisability.

‘Anything will be better for you than being worretted to death here, mum,’ says Selina. ‘I can have the charwoman to keep me company. Her husband’s out of work, and she’ll come for the sake of a good meal of victuals, and glad. And I can bring you up any letters as may come, of an evening. It will be a walk for me.’

Mrs. Westray has a few pounds of her own, and an unbroken ten-pound note, part of the sum sent her by Mrs. Brandreth’s treasurer last Saturday. The ten pounds she will leave will Selina. Her own slender purse will serve for maintenance at Wimbledon. The first thing to be done is to find a comfortable lodging, and she determines upon driving up to the village on the hill to-morrow. She can leave the carriage at some way-side inn and go on foot to hunt for her lodging, so that her coachman may not be able to inform any one of her whereabouts by and by.

How hateful—how dear—the house that has been the scene of her brief wedded life seems to her! Hateful from the horror that has fallen upon it—dear for its memories of happy days.

She takes up Herman's scattered books one by one and kisses them.

'Ah, dearest, I have loved you too fondly,' she says, 'and you have grown tired of my love. It has seemed so common a thing—given unasked, given without measure.'

She remembers a passage in *Derwent* which she and Herman discussed one happy evening by the study-fire.

'The deadliest foe to love is not change, nor misfortune, nor jealousy, nor wrath, nor anything that flows from passion, or emanates from fortune. The deadliest foe to love is *custom*.'

## CHAPTER IV.

‘ I know

I shall die as my fathers died, and sleep as they sleep :  
even so.

For the glass of the years is brittle wherein we gaze for a  
span ;

A little soul for a little bears up this corpse which is man.

So long I endure, no longer ; and laugh not again, neither  
weep.

For there is no God found stronger than death ; and death is  
a sleep.’

It is the last night of the season at the Frivolity Theatre. All the best people, and a good many insignificant people, nay, perhaps, not a few of the worst people, have left London on their autumnal migrations, and it would be quite absurd for Mrs. Brandreth to waste her sweetness on an unfashionable town. The house is crowded on this last night, though the recess is to be only of about six weeks’ duration. Wonders are promised for next season—a new actor, a new actress, a new play by that



eminently successful author Herman Westray; renovation, decoration.

People who have been intending to see Herman's comedy ever since its production flock to the little theatre to-night, to snatch their last chance of seeing it at all. The house looks brilliant, though the best people are all gone.

Between nine and ten o'clock Hamilton Lyndhurst strolls into Lord Earlswood's box. His lordship has gone to Norway for a month's fishing. Mr. Lyndhurst is pale and weary looking. He is recognised by some of the men in the stalls, who begin to talk about him mysteriously.

'How ill Lyndhurst looks!' remarks one. 'I hope there's nothing amiss with that Bolivian loan.'

'Don't think it would make any difference to him if there was,' answers his neighbour. 'He never gets hit.'

'Yes; but they say he's dipped deeply in this Bolivian business, and that it's a safe thing.'

'Depend upon it, if it's hazardous, he has dipped in and come out again.'

The first speaker looks gloomy. Bolivians weigh heavy upon his soul, and visions of prolonged con-tango vex his spirit.

Mr. Lyndhurst waits for the end of the piece, looking at the stage, but seeing very little that goes on there, though Miss Belormond is using those fine eyes of hers for his especial advantage. When the curtain falls he goes through Lord Earlswood's privileged door to the stage, and makes his way to Myra's dressing-room.

'May I come in for a few minutes before you change your dress?' he asks.

'Yes, if you will promise to stay no more than a few minutes. Badgewick, you can get me a cup of coffee,' adds Myra to her attendant, who vanishes at this command.

Mrs. Brandreth is seated before her dressing-table, with its litter of lace-bordered handkerchiefs, fans, sandal-wood glove-boxes, and diamond-cut scent-bottles. There is no vulgar untidiness, only a picturesque confusion of elegant objects.

'You are looking tired,' says Mr. Lyndhurst, dropping into one of the luxurious chairs. 'I sup-

pose you are rather glad your triumphs are suspended for a time.'

'I am more than glad. I don't think I could have endured another night of this millwheel work.'

'And yet the play is Westray's. I thought to act in a play of his was unqualified delight.'

The dark hazel eyes grow hard and cold; the flexible lips tighten.

'Yes, I am pleased to act in his pieces,' she answers. 'We owe each other success.'

'On one side, at least, the debt is large. What would he be as a dramatist if you had never given life and meaning to his work? I believe he is grateful, poor fellow! O, by the way, I saw his wife to-day.'

'Indeed!'

'Yes; I called on her this morning: found her in sad trouble, poor thing! That bill of sale has been enforced; there is a bailiff in the house.'

Not for her very life could Myra Brandreth, so clever in the management of her countenance on ordinary occasions, repress the gratified smile which curves her lip for an instant at this intelligence.

‘So ends Westray’s domestic bliss,’ continues Lyndhurst. ‘When the bailiff sneaks in at the door, Eros makes off by the window. When a man gives a bill of sale on his household goods, depend upon it domestic love, though not a recognised item, is included in the inventory.’

‘Is not Mrs. Westray’s devotion proof against calamity? I thought her a model of conjugal fidelity—the kind of wife one reads of in old stories; a species that is almost obsolete nowadays.’

‘Mrs. Westray is foolishly faithful to a husband who has grown weary of her. But I think I have given her a proof of his falsehood which will weaken her faith in him, if it does not destroy her affection for him.’

‘You have shown her—’

‘The letter picked up in your drawing-room.’

‘And she believes—’

‘Exactly what you and I intended she should believe.’

‘Don’t say *I* intended,’ remonstrates Myra. ‘It was your idea, remember.’

‘Perhaps, in its ultimate development. But I

know whose suggestion gave birth to the idea. Don't let us dispute the honour of originating the notion. It was a stroke of genius in any case, and the kind of idea that is more likely to spring from a woman's brain than from a man's.'

Myra laughs uneasily, opening and closing a large white fan with a somewhat nervous movement. Lyndhurst rises from his low chair and walks up and down the room thoughtfully.

'I suppose it is what your strictly honourable people would call an ugly business,' he says, after a pause; 'and the worst of it is that it does not seem likely to succeed.'

'How so?'

'We have made that poor creature supremely miserable, without opening the door for her release. She is not a bird to be snared so easily as you seemed to think.'

'Would you have me think well of her?' asks Myra, with lowering brow and angry eyes. 'I hate her too much for that. Yes, I hate her. It sounds horrible, does it not? She has never injured me, you say. Has she not? She robbed me of the only

heart I ever cared to win, and should have won but for her. What does it matter to me that she was unconscious of that wrong? Her ignorance does not lessen my loss. I have never hidden my feelings from you. You are just the one man I trust, because you have never pretended to be in love with me, because you have never affected to be better than you are, or to believe in creeds you secretly despise. When Lord Earlswood brought me the news of Herman's marriage, I went down on my knees and swore that if it was in human power to compass the breaking of that bond, it should be broken; that if any act of mine could sever man and wife, they should be parted. Am I likely to be scrupulous after such an oath as that?

‘Well, no, decidedly not. That is what I most admire in you, Mrs. Brandreth. You are thorough. You have trusted me and I will confide in you. You compliment me upon being what I have always acknowledged myself—an unscrupulous man, counting the creeds and codes for which other men profess reverence, by which they pretend to rule their lives, as the convenient formulæ of judicious hypo-

erites. The Stock Exchange has shown me no difference between the religious man and the infidel. Each is alike eager to enrich himself at the cost of his neighbour. Perhaps I should have been a better man than I am if I had found humanity in general better; if flatterers and parasites had not hung about me like the ivy that enfolds and strangles a tree, choking every good impulse; if women had been true to me, and not to my purse; if one holy or genuine feeling had come in my way. It never did. I have found friends false to the core; women mere money-worshippers, ready to sell their souls for a diamond parure or a pair of high-stepping horses. Never till I saw Mrs. Westray did I learn to admire virtue; never till that hour did I know the meaning of love—love which hopes one day and despairs the next; love which takes the taste out of life's common pleasures, and makes existence a slow fever of alternate elation and despondency. Should I refrain from following her because she has a husband she loves—a neglectful husband at best, who gives his brightest hours to the world, and favours her with the mere refuse of his days? No; I saw

her unappreciated, almost forsaken, and I swore to win her. I have bided my time, patiently enough so far, but I am growing tired of delay. It has been the study of my life to get happiness out of the present. I have no future.'

'Your future is just as secure as other people's, I imagine.'

'Not quite. For all men life is an uncertain quantity. Preachers enlarge upon that text *ad nauseam*. But for me the uncertainty is tenfold, and a sudden ending, come when it will, inevitable. Three years ago I had occasion to consult a physician about certain uncomfortable symptoms in the region of the heart—premonitory spasms suggestive of mischief. I had not been alarmed without cause. The oracle informed me that there was organic disease. I might live five years, or even ten; but I was a doomed man. Some day, without warning, suddenly as if struck by a shell, I should drop down, and the comedy or tragedy of life would be over for Hamilton Lyndhurst. I went to another oracle, only to hear the same sentence. This knowledge has not been without its influence on my life. If I



am more reckless than other men, remember that I stake less. No long future stretches out before me, no sluggish old age awaits me. I have tried to crowd a century of pleasure into a few years of dissipation: but pleasure after a little while becomes no more than a word, and, for any delight it affords, might as well be called pain. I should like to taste some purer joy before the fiat is issued. I should like to win wife and home—to die at the feet of the woman I love.'

'I suppose you expect me to pity you,' says Myra, half in scorn. 'I think you are a man to be envied.'

'Why envied?'

'Because you stand a chance of escaping old age—the after-taste of all life's sweetness, which, to my mind, is more bitter than death—wrinkles, gray hairs, dull eyes, neglect, the sense that one is but a ghost among the living—dead long ago, though one does not care to tell the world so. Your tree will fall in the green, you will be spared the sere and yellow leaf.'

'Perhaps you are right, but autobiography shows

us that men with sound constitutions and long purses have made rather a good thing of old age, and have left the scene regretfully at the last. It is hardly a pleasant thing to sit under the Damoclesian sword, or to have the skeleton at life's feast such a prominent figure in the foreground. My life is too uncertain even for the plans that give form and purpose to the lives of other rich men. Why should I build houses or picture-galleries, plant gardens or buy deer-parks? Before the mortar is dry I may need that narrower house we are all travelling towards. No, from the time I heard the doctor's decree I have lived as much as possible in the present. The only hope I have permitted myself is the hope of winning a wife I can love and revere.'

'Marry Miss Belormond. She admires you immensely, and is really one of the handsomest women in London.'

A shudder is Mr. Lyndhurst's sole reply to this suggestion.

'Well, come to me to-morrow morning, and we'll talk over this infatuation of yours.'

Hamilton Lyndhurst accepts this invitation for

to-morrow as his dismissal for to-night, and takes his leave immediately. Miss Belormond is standing at the wing as he passes out, gorgeously arrayed as Hypolita, queen of the Amazons, in gold tissue, with a considerable display of pink silk legs and jewelled buskins, and a cataract of somebody else's hair falling over her like a mantle, the whole crowned with a glittering helmet.

She smiles benignly upon Mr. Lyndhurst as he goes by, and wonders that he does not linger for a few minutes' flirtation. She has been told that he is one of the richest men in London, and a bachelor, and she feels that for such a man she could forego her chances of dramatic renown, and content herself with the quiet simplicity of domestic life, embellished with servants in livery and a three-hundred-guinea barouche.

## CHAPTER V.

‘ Lo now, what hearts have men! they never mount  
As high as woman in her selfless mood.’

EDITHA succeeds in finding a charming lodging—not at Wimbledon, but at Roehampton—a rustic-looking cottage with irreproachable geraniums in all the windows, and a good-natured maiden lady as proprietress. Here Mrs. Westray brings nurse and baby next day, carrying away from Bridge-end House only one portmanteau containing her plainest dresses, and a box for baby. She allows Selina to show the custodian box and portmanteau open, that he may see she is taking nothing that belongs to the house—no bronze, or china, or plate. Alas, the fine old massive silver from the Priory plate-chests, and all Herman’s pretty gifts collected in the two years of their married life, are included in the inventory which gives a stranger dominion over Mr. Westray’s household goods! But even this fact

hardly pains Editha now. What matters the shattered home now that love has deserted its empty hearth? Let all things go—memorials of happiness departed!

After the revelation of that fatal letter, Mrs. Westray has no expectation of her husband's return in answer to her summons. His going to the scene of war has doubtless been a deeply planned business from first to last. He knew the wreck of his home to be inevitable, and cared nothing for it, having new hopes and schemes for the future—a home in exile with his first love. The letter to Mrs. Brandreth tells that plainly enough. When he wrote that letter—on the eve of his departure most likely—he had no intention of coming back to England. With the same pen he wrote to his wife, touching lightly on his difficulties, talking hopefully of retrenchment in the future. Specious and cruel letter, meant to lull suspicion, full of promises never intended to be fulfilled.

Broken-hearted, desolate beyond all measure, Editha retires to the peaceful shelter of the Rotherhampton lodging, feeling even in her misery that

there is an infinite relief in getting quite away from that dreadful bailiff. Baby, with infinite love of novelty, is pleased with the change in his surroundings, and takes kindly to the solitary maiden of the cottage. The rooms are airy and exquisitely clean, with that absolute purity which is oftenest to be found in a very small house, where the searching eye of the mistress espies every grain of dust or lurking cobweb, every cloud upon the window-panes or infinitesimal morsel of flue hovering in the folds of the drapery. Jane the nursemaid, a girl of less philosophic temper than Selina, is glad to escape from Bridge-end House.

‘It seemed as if there was a cloud hanging over the house after that man come in, mem,’ she remarks, as she attends upon her mistress and Master George at tea; ‘master away and all, too. It’s all very well for Selina to take it so easy; but I never lived where there was anything of that kind, and I found it prey upon my spirits. I’m sure the way that old gentleman used his knife was enough to spoil any one’s appetite for their dinner. Such a greedy way with him, too. He told us he was a pig for

Irish stew, and I'm sure he carried out the observation.'

Editha has been three days in this new abode—very quiet days. She has written home telling Ruth that she has taken a lodging at Roehampton for a week or two, because the air is better for baby. Not a word has she said about the bill of sale or Herman's perfidy. Let the tragedy of her life play itself to the end. Her lips and her pen will be slow to tell her husband's dishonour. There has been no letter from Herman to his wife during this time. The *Day Star* gives a long letter daily. Bright, graphic as ever is the betrayer's pen. The fatal second of September has come and gone. The battle of Sedan has been fought, and Napoleon has laid down his sword. Herman is at the scene of action, and his pen depicts that disastrous conflict, the bloody field, the gloomy resignation of the fallen emperor—the stamp of death already on that thoughtful brow—the awful despair of the fatalist whom Fate has beaten.

Editha reads those animated descriptions with a feeling of horror. He can write so vividly, he can

be so fully master of his intellect at the very moment his heart is full of treachery, his mind plotting deceit! Is this the man she has loved and thought noblest among mankind—brave, frank, honourable, true?

The *Day Star* gives a few lines to the closing of the Frivolity Theatre:

‘Mrs. Brandreth’s *bijou* house will reopen in October, with a new comedy from the pen of Mr. Westray, whose genius is allied with the fortunes of this charming theatre.’

‘She is free now,’ thinks Editha, ‘free to follow her old lover. I ought to have understood the story of Herman’s life when I saw *Kismet*.’

About five o’clock on the third afternoon of Mrs. Westray’s residence at Roehampton Selina arrives, flushed and warm, after her walk up the hilly lane which leads from the Richmond road to this secluded village on the edge of the heath. Selina wears her Sunday clothes, the last fashionable thing in black silk jackets, a good deal of hay-coloured horsehair at the back of her head, and a Parisian bonnet at half a guinea from the Brompton-road.



‘O, if you please, mum,’ she begins, ‘I thought I’d better step up with it, as it might be of consequence. It came when I was a-cleaning of myself, and I didn’t lose a hinstant putting on my hout-door things before I started to bring it.’

Mysterious address, in which the all-important noun is represented by an unidead pronoun.

‘Bring what, Selina?’ asks Editha, while the girl searches in a pocket, which is a whole breadth behind the convenient position for pockets, and obliges Selina to twist her figure round in an uncomfortable way and make an animated corkscrew of herself as she dives into it.

‘Is it a letter?’

‘No, mum, a telegraph from foreign parts.’

‘From my husband!’ cries Editha. Her face flushes, her heart beats. He has not forgotten her altogether, even yet. He has something important to tell. Is it the bold revealment of his guilt, or is he repentant? Is the telegram to announce his re turn to home and loyalty?

‘O, do be quick, Selina,’ she cries piteously, and at last Selina extracts the document from a pocket

which is absolutely choked with a handkerchief, a pair of gloves,—which Selina, finding the atmosphere oppressive, has taken off during her walk,—a couple of green apples, a memorandum-book, a slate pencil, the door key, a needle-case, and her mother's last letter.

The telegram is from Ostend.

‘Come at once. I have been taken seriously ill on my way home, and am laid up at the Hôtel des Ambassadeurs. The boat leaves Dover for Ostend at ten P.M. Do not delay.’

‘Delay!’ exclaims Editha; ‘as if I should waste an instant. My dearest one ill and among strangers. Thank God that his first impulse was to send for me.’

Forgotten for the moment his treachery, his guilt. Her only thought is how she can fly fastest to his side. Unhappily there is but one pace for the careless traveller indifferent as to waste of time, and the eager lover flying to his mistress, or the fraudulent bankrupt flying from his creditors. The Dover mail leaves at a given hour, the night has but one boat for Ostend. Editha hurries a few things into

her portmanteau; divides her small stock of money with the nurse; gives a hundred instructions about baby's welfare during her absence; kisses and cries over that young gentleman for five minutes or so; spends another five minutes on her knees in the little white-curtained bedchamber, imploring Heaven's protection for her child, and then drives away in a fly, with the faithful Selina for escort as far as the railway-station.

Ill, seriously ill, says the telegram. Dying, perhaps. The wife's lips move in silent prayer as the fly jolts and jingles onward upon its journey from suburb to city. Ill, in danger, perhaps! But surely Death will spare him. Heaven will give him back to her, made whole in mind and in body, repentant of intended falsehood, snatched back from sin's fatal gulf by kindly sickness. What better school for self-examination and repentance than the quiet of a sick-bed. She hastens to him—thankful for the summons which calls her to his side—fearful but not hopeless.

## CHAPTER VI.

*Iachimo.* With five times so much conversation, I should get ground of your fair mistress, make her go back, even to the yielding, had I admittance and opportunity to friend.

*Posthumus.* No, no.

*Iachimo.* I dare thereupon pawn the moiety of my estate to your ring ; which, in my opinion, overvalues it something : but I make my wager rather against your confidence than her reputation : and, to bar your offence herein too, I durst attempt it against any lady in the world.

*Posthumus.* You are a great deal abused in too bold a persuasion ; and I doubt not you sustain what you're worthy of by your attempt.

*Iachimo.* What's that ?

*Posthumus.* A repulse : though your attempt, as you call it, deserve more ; a punishment too.

BIG raindrops begin to fall as the Dover mail leaves murky London behind and pierces into the heart of the fair Kentish landscape—past homely farmhouses, and orchards where the branches of the apple-trees are bending under their burden of fruit, crimson and amber, green and russet ; past Gothic villas, with their trim new gardens, geometrical flower-beds, year-old gooseberry-bushes, and peach-trees stretched upon

the new red walls like the fingers of a skeleton hand ; past hop-fields, where the vines are climbing to the tops of the poles, and stretching out green tendrils to their neighbours as in friendly greeting ; past broad fields of tawny wheat still waiting the sickle, and vast plains of stubble whence the barley has been carried ; and so to the chalky cliffs, and the old Roman stronghold standing darkly out against a stormy sky, where a young moon rides like a labouring vessel in a sea of clouds.

The night is rainy and blustering ; and Editha, travelling for the first time alone, follows the railway porter along the slippery pier, and knows not into what bottomless pit she may be descending, as she gropes her way down to the Ostend boat. Travellers dash about wildly in the darkness ; every one acts as if his voyage were a matter of life and death, his portmanteau stuffed with specie or uncut diamonds, so fearful does he seem lest that treasure should be reft from him. Pushed and buffeted by her neighbours, Editha reaches the wet deck somehow, and pauses there bewildered by the ferocious snorting of the engine, which seems to be remonstrating

savagely against enforced inaction. The rain drives her down to the ladies' cabin. Who knows not that awful scene, that modern embodiment of the Black Hole at Calcutta?—an airless cupboard with cushioned shelves, on which bundles of limp humanity lie helpless, motionless, their heads tied up in pocket-handkerchiefs, perhaps, like victims about to be offered on the altar of Poseidon, who is already flapping against the sides of the vessel with prophetic threatenings. One prostrate female lies on the floor. The steward—a permitted intruder, like the dusky guardian of a seraglio—distributes basins methodically and unblushingly, cheerfully even, as if they were crockery pools dealt out to the players in some round game.

From this hideous scene Mrs. Westray recoils horror-stricken, and reascends to the deck. The steamer is plunging in a wretchedly head-foremost fashion through the waves. Dover's lamplit crescent recedes, the castle bobs up and down among the clouds above the hill. The steamer gives a lurch, and makes as if it would turn head over heels, then reels frantically sideways like a shying horse. Shiny

men in oilskin coats and sou'-westers stagger up and down the deck. No woman's form relieves the dismal scene, and Editha feels that conventionality compels her return to that hideous den below. She goes down again, finds a corner to sit in—room to lie down there is none—and tries to lose her sense of the surrounding horror in sleep.

Sleep while Herman awaits her—ill, perhaps dying! That were indeed impossible. She shuts her eyes and thinks of him, prays for him, prays for her darling boy at Roehampton, separated for the first time from his mother. She prays while her fellow-passengers groan and perform a concerted piece upon the theme of sea-sickness.

Dawn, bleak, gray, and ghastly, a dismal struggle betwixt light and darkness, and the vessel, rolling, pitching, creaking, grumbling, blundering, grinds against the landing-stage at Ostend. Every one rushes frantically to the gangway or struggles vindictively for luggage; touts, porters, and custom-house officials clamour hoarsely in the dim light. A dreary stretch of quay; white houses glimmering faintly in the distance, dingier buildings looming

dark in the foreground ; a slate-coloured sea heaving and surging in the background ; of these things Editha is dimly conscious, as she contrives to distinguish her portmanteau from the mass of luggage, and to get it conveyed to the custom-house. Here a weary interval : portmanteaus laid out on a long counter like bodies awaiting dissection ; travellers delivering up their keys ; hotel-touts lauding their several establishments on every side ; Flemish, indifferent French, broken English—Babel on a small scale.

‘ Hôtel des Ambassadeurs, family hotel—baths—table-d’hôte—English spoken—all that there is of most comfortable,’ says a man at Mrs. Westray’s side, trying to possess himself of her travelling-bag.

‘ Yes ; that is the hotel I want to go to,’ she replies eagerly. ‘ Is it near ?’

‘ But yes, madame, it is all near. But you will have a carriage for the luggage,’ he adds persuasively, the hotel in question being nearly a mile off. ‘ Will madame have the goodness to indicate to me her packets ?’

Editha points out her solitary portmanteau, and



gives the man the key thereof. By the exercise of some occult influence upon the custom-house officer he gets the portmanteau opened, glanced into, locked, and handed over to him with expedition, and leads the way out on the quay, where he hands Mrs. Westray into a dilapidated vehicle drawn by two gray horses about the size of one English horse cut in two, and of less than one-horse-power. The commissionnaire mounts the box, the starveling horses shamble away from the custom-house over the stoniest road Editha has ever travelled, the stunted coach jingles through the sleeping town of Ostend—not the gayest of towns even in its waking hours, and by this half light a street of tombs, yawning *portecochères* leading to family vaults, a shabby church or two, and a noble expanse of paving-stones.

On goes the joggling equipage, the small gray horses tugging desperately as if they were dragging Cleopatra's Needle, past the town and to the more aristocratic portion of Ostend facing the digue. Here the vehicle shoots off at a tangent, the driver screaming vociferously and *houplà-ing* to an alarming extent, and suddenly twists into the courtyard of a

big white hotel. Huge black letters along the façade of the mansion proclaim it to be l'Hôtel des Ambassadeurs.

A half-awakened waiter stands in the doorway, waiting for any victims from the Dover boat, and plucks up a little animation on seeing Editha alight from her coach-and-pair. Night is still at odds with morning; everything has a dim and dismal look. The hall and windows of the hotel are dark and shadowy, redolent of yesterday's table-d'hôte.

'Is Mr. Westray here?' Editha asks eagerly.

'An English monsieur? Yes.'

'Is he better?' she asks. And as the man stares at her stupidly and is dumb, she adds impatiently, 'Take me to his room this moment, please. You can pay the coachman afterwards. I am Mrs. Westray.'

'But certainly, madame. It is on the second floor. This way, madame; take the trouble to ascend that step.'

The man leads the way up a broad shallow staircase, shining and slippery, along a corridor on which innumerable doors open, up another flight of

stairs, past a landing where two plaster nymphs admire themselves in a large mirror, into another corridor, where he selects a door at which to knock.

‘Entrez,’ says a voice within. Not Herman’s voice assuredly. No sick man’s voice was ever so deep and full. The doctor’s, perhaps.

Mrs. Westray enters, and the waiter runs down stairs to pay the driver of that nondescript vehicle with the ragged gray horses.

She finds herself in a large sitting-room, furnished in the usual fashion: flowered-tapestry curtains; amber damask-covered chairs and sofas, which look as if they were meant for anything rather than repose; a centre table, with an impracticable ink-stand; gilded vases of artificial roses on the velvet-covered mantelpiece; gilded clock, marking just the remotest hour of the twelve. A lamp burns dimly on a side-table; one uncurtained window, left ajar looks out on the dull gray sea. The waves roar monotonously in the distance; a pale-yellow light glimmers on the horizon.

The room is empty, but an open door communicates with an inner room. The sick man’s chamber,

no doubt. Editha hurries towards this door, but before she can cross the room a man comes out of that inner chamber—Hamilton Lyndhurst. He is very pale, and has a haggard look in his eyes as of one who has out-watched the night.

‘You here,’ she cries, with a look of aversion, ‘with my husband!’

‘Here, dear Mrs. Westray, but not with your husband,’ he answers, going to the outer door. He has locked it and put the key in his pocket, while Editha stands in the middle of the room looking about her in sheer bewilderment.

‘Where is Herman?’ she cries distractedly; and then seeing what he has done, she asks with sudden horror, ‘Why do you lock that door?’

‘To the best of my belief, Mr. Westray is with the belligerents in the vicinity of Sedan. Why have I locked that door, Editha? Only because I would be heard by you patiently till I have told all my story. You might refuse to hear the end if I did not put some constraint on you. On my honour as a gentleman there is no shadow of disrespect in the action. Alone in a desert island my reverence for

you would triumph over every meaner feeling. The task I have set myself is to win you, Editha; to touch your heart, to convince your understanding, to prove to you that love such as mine is not lightly to be scorned. Forgive me if I begin with a stratagem.'

'Your honour,' she echoes, as if she had heard only the beginning of his speech, 'your honour as a gentleman! It is blasphemy against the name of gentleman for you to make such an appeal. It was you, then, who sent me this lying message telling me that my husband was dangerously ill? Thank God, that is not true; thank God, even though I have been duped and fooled by your treachery. And now, sir, open that door, and let me leave this house. The next boat will take me back to England.'

She takes a hurried survey of the walls, looking for a bell which she may ring, summoning the servants of the house. In a large hotel, full of people, she cannot be long in the power of this traitor. There is no bell to be seen.

Lyndhurst interprets that eager look.

'Do not trouble yourself about the bell,' he says; 'it has been removed.'

‘Will you unlock that door?’ she asks again desperately.

‘Not till you have listened to me, Editha; not till you have heard me plead my cause. You could dismiss me contemptuously from your own house. There you were all-powerful. You did not spare me. Love, even the guiltiest, should claim a noble-minded woman’s pity. You were without compassion for my love, which, I declare to you, is not altogether an unholy passion. It was strong enough to outlive your scorn, humble enough to pardon insult, steadfast enough to persevere in the face of rejection. You are my prisoner, Editha. Call me treacherous, if you like—brutal, if you like. You must and shall stay with me till you have heard all that a man who loves as I do can urge in extenuation of the wrong inseparable from love that comes too late.’

‘I will not hear you,’ she answers, calmer in this hour of peril than he had thought to find her. ‘You are talking to the winds when you talk to me. Can you not understand that there may be such a woman in the world as a wife who loves her hus-

band and fears her God? Has your experience of life been so infamous, that you believe that a few specious speeches can turn a wife from her fidelity to the husband of her choice? Were I the most miserable creature that ever unhappy fate linked to a man she despised, you could not think worse of me than you do, when you suppose that any baseness of yours, any snare you may set for me, will prevail over faithful and honest love.'

'Faithful to a man who is weary of you—faithful to a man who never really loved you! Faithful in the face of that letter which I gave you the other day—that letter with its boldly-avowed infidelity! No, Editha; I do not suppose you weak-minded enough for such slavish adherence to a violated tie, when love, real and perfect love, is at your feet. Consider, dearest, between what different destinies your choice lies. With Westray, neglect, abandonment, the humiliating pity which the world bestows on a slighted wife, poverty, a ruined home; with me, love unbounded, wealth without limit, all that this world we live in offers of the brightest and best—'

‘And dishonour—the consciousness of being the vilest among women!’ says Editha, interrupting him. ‘You are wasting your eloquence, Mr. Lyndhurst. Your knowledge of my sex may be profound, but you have mistaken the temper of the woman you have tried to ensnare. Open that door and let me pass. Were we to argue for an hour, the result would be the same. Your pretended love inspires no feeling in my mind but loathing. My contempt is so great that I do not even fear you.’

The brave clear eyes looked at him boldly, bright with invincible scorn.

‘Do you not fear me?’ cries Hamilton Lyndhurst passionately. ‘Beware how you boast. Do you think when I lured you here I had not made up my mind to win you? Ah, my beloved, you do not know what love is in a man who stakes all upon one cast. Yes, I am a traitor; granted—a traitor and no gentleman. I staked my honour against so high a prize, that, let me but win the game, and I am happy in dishonour. I can afford even that you should hate me for a little while, Editha, for in the end you will learn to love me.



Love such as mine must prevail. Do not provoke me to desperation. Consider what kind of man I am before you pay devotion with contempt. For this world's opinion I care nothing. I fear nothing beyond or above this world. I am told that I have not very long to live. I am warned that if I would taste the sweetness of life, I must win my earthly Elysium quickly. I am no Ulysses, to be beaten and buffeted about the world for a score of years, and find home and wife at the last. Now—now while the last glow of youth still warms my heart—now I must be blessed. Do you think I am a man to let go my prize, having sworn to win it?

‘I think you are a villain and a coward, and that God is above us both,’ answers Editha unflinchingly, ‘and I repeat that I do not fear you.’

‘Fear the world's malice if you defy me,’ says Lyndhurst in a sibilant whisper, such as woman's first tempter may have breathed into the ear of Eve. ‘Fear your lost good name, your husband's contempt—fear to face the society whose laws you outraged when you came to meet me here. Tell the world your story, and see how readily you will be

believed. The world believes only the worst. Appear before the world injured, a dupe, a sufferer, faithful in calamity, and see what tender treatment you will have of its charity. Without my protection, without my love, you are a ruined woman. As my wife, wealth and power will be yours. Your innocent soul cannot reckon the master-sway wealth holds over the meanness of mankind.'

For the first time since she has entered the snare Hamilton Lyndhurst sees his victim tremble. But it is indignation and not fear which makes her frame quiver as she draws herself to her fullest height, sternly confronting him.

'Once for all, will you open that door?' she asks.

'Not till we have come to terms—not till you have given me a promise that shall bind your fate with mine from this day. You will leave this room on my arm, in the face of society, compromised as Mrs. Westray, pledged to be my wife so soon as the law can undo one knot and tie another.'

Her breath comes faster. She looks at him desperately, like a hunted fawn round which the dogs are closing in a deadly circle.

‘ You mean it—you swear that you will not let me go ?’

‘ Not till I have your promise.’

‘ And if I cry aloud for help—call the people of the house ?’

‘ Do you think I would let you be heard ? Except the man who admitted you just now, there is not a creature astir in the house, and I daresay he has crept back to his hole to snatch a last half-hour’s sleep. No, Editha ; I am master of the situation, and I am resolved to use my power to the uttermost.’

‘ Then God help and pardon me in my extremity !’ she cries, with clasped hands and eyes uplifted, and with one wild rush flies to the window which stands ajar, the long casement window opening on a frail balcony.

Her hand is on the latch ; another moment, and she will have thrown herself over that shallow balcony to certain death. Quick as Lyndhurst is, he is not a breath too soon. He grasps her arm, and drags her back into the room.

‘ Great God,’ he cries in a choking voice, ‘ she is

mad !' and holds her for an instant motionless, powerless in his agonised clutch.

Suddenly, as she looks at him half in terror, half in anger, his face changes, with an awful mysterious transformation she has never seen before in the human countenance, haply may never see again. He gives one faint choking cry, tears at his breast with convulsive hand for a moment, and then falls like a stone figure overturned at its base—falls with a shock that makes the room tremble, and lies at her feet, still as clay.

Her shriek rends the air. All the passion and terror of the last half-hour finds relief in that wild cry. Not once, but again and again she screams, with frantic appeal for help from man or Heaven ; but the figure stretched at her feet, face downwards, does not stir.

Involuntarily she looks round again for the bell that is not there. Needless the bell now, for her cries have been heard. There is a hurrying of feet in the corridor, a vigorous hand tries to open the door vainly. Voices are heard consulting hastily ; a few moments' delay, and a key is in the lock, the

door opens, and foremost among an eager little group enters Herman Westray.

Those piercing shrieks have brought him—a wakeful sojourner in a room half a dozen doors off—to the help of a stranger.

It is something more than a common surprise to find that the wild appeal for succour came from his wife. Stranger, more awful is it, to see that prostrate figure with hidden face.

‘Editha!’

She flings herself upon his breast, sobbing hysterically.

‘O, thank God, thank God!’ she cries. ‘I knew He would not abandon me in my peril.’

‘Editha, in Heaven’s name what brings you here?’ asks her husband, stupid with amazement. He has been roused from an uneasy morning sleep by those awful screams of hers, has hurriedly huddled on his clothes, half-awakened, and is not in a condition for grasping the meaning of things quickly.

‘I’ll tell you by and by,’ she sobs. ‘Will some one,’ looking round at the agitated group in the doorway, ‘see to him?’

She points, with a look of loathing, to the fallen figure.

The bystanders hurry forward and kneel down beside it, and try to raise the massive shoulders, heavy as marble.

‘Who is that man?’ cries Herman.

‘Your friend, Mr. Lyndhurst.’

‘Editha!’ he exclaims, looking at her with unutterable horror. Of all names that could be spoken at such a moment, there is none more ominous to Herman Westray’s ear than this.

‘Yes, he fell down in a fit just now. Had they not better fetch a doctor?’

‘Let him die where he fell!’ cries Herman, beside himself. ‘How did you come to this place? Why do I find you with that man?’

He is reckless who hears him. Happily there are no English listeners; but the fact is indifferent to him in his passion. No sense of prudence restrains him—no consideration for his wife’s reputation ties his tongue.

‘What brought you here?’ he gasps.

‘I came in answer to a telegram from you, telling

me that you were here, dangerously ill—telling me to lose no time.'

'I sent no such telegram. Show me the message.'

She feels for it in her pocket. Even in her confusion she remembers putting that telegram in her pocket after reading it for about the twentieth time on board the steamer, by the dim light of the cabin lamp. It is not to be found. She must have dragged it out with her handkerchief, and dropped it perhaps in that wretched hackney-coach which brought her to the hotel.

'I have lost it; but it does not matter.'

'Not in the least,' answers Herman in a curious tone; and at this moment the attention of husband and wife is called from their own affairs to that prostrate figure round which the hotel people are gathered. They have raised it from the ground, and the awful face looks up at them, the eyes fixed and open, staring horridly as in some sudden terror. Gray and dull is that stony face; heavily hang those limbs, as they lift up the figure that was once Hamilton Lyndhurst, and lay it on the amber-

covered sofa. They fall back when their work is done, in a shuddering group, murmuring compassionately,

‘Le pauvre homme—un si belle homme—mort comme ça, si subitement; un vrai coup de foudre; mais c’est effrayant.’ And then some one cries,

‘Mais cours donc, Georges; va trouver un médecin.’

Little need of a doctor to affirm the appalling fact. The arrest has come. The sentence has been pronounced. The selfish sensual soul, which has never known an aspiration beyond earthly happiness, has gone to its account.

‘Come away, Editha,’ Herman says sternly; ‘come away from this revolting scene.’ And then he says in a whisper, close to her ear, as they leave the room together, ‘Your lover has not enjoyed his triumph long. Retribution has trodden on the heels of guilt a little closer than usual.’

She looks at him in blank amazement. Can he doubt her? Can any evidence shake his faith in her purity?

She has believed him guilty on the testimony of



his own hand-writing, but she is not the less wonder-stricken to find he can suspect her. And yet her presence here with that dead man is circumstantial evidence strong enough to blast the reputation of a modern Lucretia.

## CHAPTER VII.

‘ If you have tears prepare to shed them now.’

LORD EARLSWOOD, bored to death in a Norwegian pine-forest, is recalled suddenly to the boredom of civilisation by a telegram brought by a mounted messenger from Christiana, a messenger who has been two days finding his lordship.

‘ Bless my soul !’ exclaims Lord Earlswood before opening the missive, ‘ is it to say the Frivolity is burnt down, I wonder ? Theatres generally are burnt down in the long-run. Carpenters will indulge in a foolish preference for lighting their pipes in a hurry, and throwing unextinguished lucifer matches among their shavings. Good for the building interest ! Haw !’

Thus to his faithful companion, Captain Shlooker, late of the Fusiliers.

‘ Hope it isn’t the theatre,’ says Shlooker sympathetically. ‘ Jolly little box. Nicest house in London. Splendid woman, Mrs. Brandreth.’

‘Don’t say that again,’ exclaims his lordship irritably, it’s not original. You’ve made the same remark half a dozen times a day for the last fortnight.’

‘Well, there isn’t much to talk about in a Norwegian hut. No morning papers, no club, no corner. And you’re not a great hand at starting subjects.’

‘I expect to be talked to,’ replies Earlswood grandly.

‘As to remarking that Mrs. Brandreth is a sple—well, I won’t say it again, that is only a spontaneous burst of feeling on my part. I admire her immensely.’

‘Bother your <sup>star</sup> admiration! I don’t believe you’d stand a box of Jouvin’s gloves to save her from starvation.’

‘Hadn’t you better read your telegram, and see if the Frivolity is burnt down?’ inquires the Captain blandly.

His lordship, thus reminded, hitches a glass into his eye, and peruses the document in question.

It tells him nothing about the Frivolity Theatre.

The message is from the housekeeper at Redhill Park, telling him that Lady Earlswood is dangerously ill, and urging his immediate return.

The message has been sent out from the head office three days ago—at least three days more must elapse before he can reach England. His presence at that sick bed can be of little use, can afford small solace, he thinks, for her ladyship and he have been at daggers drawn throughout the seven years of their wedded life, having a different way of thinking upon every subject. But he is quite ready to obey the summons; and he and Captain Shlooker concentrate their somewhat limited intellects into one focus, and apply themselves to the task of getting back to England as soon as possible.

They have an arsenal of guns, a small cartload of fishing-rods and tackle, a few hundredweight of tinned provisions and other stores to dispose of, to say nothing of their portable dwelling-house, portable boats, and other gear. These they leave to be packed and shipped by guides and servants, two of which incumbrances Lord Earlswood has brought in his train. Then, unattended save by his faithful

shadow, Captain Shlooker, Lord Earlswood starts for England.

He disembarks from the Norwegian steamer at Hull, within four days of his receipt of the telegram from Redhill Park, just in time to catch the London express, without stopping to have so much as a 'brandy-and-soda,' as Captain Shlooker remarks pathetically on the platform, his case-loving soul disapproving this uncomfortable haste.

'What's the use of being in such a hurry, Earlswood?' he remonstrates; 'we might just as well have stopped for a Turkish bath and a bit of dinner, and gone up by the mail. I feel as if I'd been living up a chimney. You can't do any good at Redhill.'

'I know that,' answers the imperturbable nobleman; 'but I've been sent for, and it's only civil to go. I should like to shake hands with Elfrida before she dies.'

Lady Earlswood is the fifth daughter of the Earl of Mercia, an intensely Saxon nobleman, who has chosen his children's names from the chronicles of the Heptarchy.

‘How do you know she’s going to die?’ asks the Captain discontentedly. It is hard lines for a healthy young parasite to be deprived of those comforts and luxuries which are the sole recompense of his labours. ‘I daresay it’s only a whim sending for you in this way, and we might just as well have stopped and had another go at the salmon.’

‘I’ll tell you what it is, Shlooker,’ replies Lord Earlswood sternly. ‘If you don’t want to go to London, you can stay where you are. I can exist without you. We shall have to part company at the Great Northern terminus, in any case. You can’t go to Redhill with me, you know.’

‘Of course not; but I’m coming to London with you, anyhow. A fellow must grumble a little now and then, and that steamer was such a beastly hole.’

‘As to Lady Earlswood sending for me out of caprice,’ pursues his lordship presently, when they are comfortably seated in a *coupé*, puffing away at their patagas as they fly over the level shores of Humber, ‘that’s not likely. In the first place, she’s a strong-minded woman; and in the second, she hates me like poison.’

‘A little wrong here?’ interrogates the Captain, tapping his forehead.

‘Not the least in the world. Awfully sensible woman, but disgustingly religious—Low, you know; walked out of church if she saw a fellow go up the pulpit stairs in his surplice; always psalm-singing; played hymn tunes on a harmonium all Sunday evening when she wasn’t in church, and played ’em dooced bad into the bargain—more bellows than toon, you know; went in for district-visiting, and used to go and sing hymns over the patients in the infirmary. I never sat down to dinner with her without being afraid of smallpox, or measles, or something revolting of that kind. Then she called everything sinful, except howling and district-visiting. She was always sitting in judgment on me, and prophesying that Providence would take it out of me in some fearful way for keeping race-horses. Used to wonder I could go to the City and Suburban without fearing I should be struck dead. Heard that I’d been seen at the Alhambra, and asked me if I didn’t expect a judgment. “No,” says I, “I’m not concerned in any chancery proceedings;” and then she shows me the

whites of her eyes, and talks about my profanity. Now a fellow does not get married for that kind of thing, you know.'

'Certainly not; uncommon hard upon a fellow; regular sell,' assents the Captain sympathetically.

'Lord Mercia was a heavy swell of the old school,' says his lordship, inclining to confidence. 'No end of ancestry, but very little money; left a widower with eleven children, eight of them daughters; let his house in Grosvenor-square furnished, spent most of his time in chambers in the Albany, while his eight daughters—all with Saxon names, and all sandy-haired—vegetated at his castle in the north. The match was my mother's doing; she thought Elfrida's piety would keep me in the right path. But one may have too much of a good thing, you know. If she'd drawn it a little milder, I could have borne it; but Sam Weller's deputy Shepherd was a fool to her in the matter of preaching, and she hasn't his humanising leaning towards pineapple-rum-and-water.'

Captain Shlooker considers his patron deserving of infinite pity.



After this the conversation drifts towards horse-racing, and the two gentlemen discuss the probabilities as to the Doncaster Cup and Leger. They part company at the terminus, the Captain sympathetic and depressed, not quite seeing how he is to dispose of himself during the dull season, now that the Norwegian trip is 'off.'

The September day is drawing to a close as Lord Earlswood drives in an open fly from the station to Redhill Park, that patrimonial estate of his of which, during the last six years, he has seen very little. The sun is setting redly behind a distant clump of beeches as the fly enters the park by a gate opening into a lane that leads to the station. The lodge-keeper's little girl, in a lavender-cotton pinafore, runs out to open the gate; and it does not occur to Lord Earlswood to interrogate this child upon the state of the lady up at the great house yonder—a square and formal building with a Corinthian colonnade and portico. The glow of the sunset shines on those straight rows of windows, and the same crimson glory is reflected on the placid surface of the oblong lake at the bottom of a broad flight of stone steps which descends

from the terrace before the mansion. A handsome house, doubtless, but a vast and stately dwelling-place which would need much domestic love, or a world of pleasant company to keep it warm. Lord Earlswood has found it too large for domestic felicity, too small for matrimonial concord.

The blinds are not drawn down. All is well with her ladyship, he thinks, as the fly drives under the lofty portico, never designed for the shelter of so plebeian a vehicle.

The hall-door is open, and he sees the black and white marble paving, the stone staircase with its double flight, the chilly bronze banisters; for sole ornament two green tubs, containing blossomless, fruitless orange-trees, which stand like dusky guardians on either side the portal; altogether as cheerful as an ice-house. The grumbling wheels of the fly have made themselves heard in the eternal silence of the place, and the old butler comes out to see what convulsion of nature has disturbed the repose of the scene. He was the old butler when this present Algernon, Lord Earlswood, was a lad at Eton. Algernon has grown to manhood, and feels as if his

May of life were falling into the sear and yellow leaf : but the old butler seems to him no older than in the days of his boyhood. His placid old face lights up at sight of his lord, and then grows suddenly grave.

‘ How do, Rogers ? How is Lady Earlswood ? ’

Rogers shakes his head dismally.

‘ Too late, my lord, I’m sorry to say.’

‘ Bless my soul, you don’t mean—’

‘ The funeral took place yesterday, at two o’clock in the afternoon. The Honourable Edwy and the Honourable Athelstane were chief mourners.’

‘ It must have been very sudden,’ says Lord Earlswood, shocked by these unexpected tidings.

He had known that his wife must be seriously ill when she allowed him to be summoned, but he had not supposed that she was on her deathbed.

‘ Her ladyship had been ailing for some time, my lord,’ replies Rogers. ‘ She caught a cold last winter attending evening church, it being against her principles to have the horses out on Sunday, and the cold hung about her and fixed itself on her chest. I dare say if she had obeyed the doctor she might have

shaken it off, but she wouldn't give up her districk-visiting.'

'No,' interrupts an awful voice, which echoes fearfully in the stony hall. 'She lived like a martyr, and she died like one. Blessed will be her reward beyond the jasper sea.'

The voice, hollow and dismal though it is, is a female voice, and proceeds from a tall square-shouldered lady in deepest mourning. She is a being composed of angles. Her elbows are square, her jaw is square, the ends of her bony fingers are as square as the finger-tips of a hard-working carpenter. She has a cold gray eye, which assumes a stony look as she gazes at Lord Earlswood.

'I—I hope her illness was not a very painful one,' says his lordship, confused by this unlovely apparition. 'As for her life being martyrdom, I can hardly see that. She took her own way in everything, spent as much money as she liked, and altogether, you know, lived her own life. I can't see what more any woman can want.'

'There are some women whose human hearts sigh for something more than this; there are some

who desire fidelity in a husband,' says the accuser, holding Lord Earlewood with her glittering eye.

'O, come, you know,' says the accused, 'we had better let bygones be bygones. All the world knows that Lady Earlswood and I were never suited to each other.'

'The angels in heaven know a great deal more, Lord Earlswood,' returns the awful female.

'Well, since I am too late to be of any use,' says the wretched nobleman, who feels helpless as a fly that suddenly finds itself in the grip of a full-bodied spider, 'I may as well go back to town by the next train. I'm rather used up, travelling post-haste from Norway—sea voyage, and all that kind of thing. You haven't dismissed the fly, have you, Rogers?'

'Yes, my lord; I thought you would stay the night.'

'O, but hang it, you know, I've no things!'

'I can telegraph to your lordship's man,' suggests the butler.

'My lordship's man was left behind in Norway to pack my traps. I must get back to town to-night.'

I can have a carriage of some kind, I suppose,' adds the master of the house meekly.

'Of course, my lord; I'll order the brougham. The last train leaves at 9.40.'

'Gracious powers!' thinks his lordship; 'and it is only just eight. At the mercy of this fearful woman for an hour and forty minutes!'

This fearful woman is Miss Gregory, the late Lady Earlswood's companion and chief toady. There have been secondary toadies, in the persons of the housekeeper and my lady's own maid; but Miss Gregory—a lady of masculine education and Low Church views—has been the ruling spirit of the household. Very hard has been her rule. Rogers, the old butler, rejoices inwardly that the end has come. Lord Earlswood, having an hour and a half to dispose of, looks about him curiously. He is rather glad to see his ancestral home again, after a lapse of six years.

'It is not half a bad place,' he tells himself in his modern slang, that shorthand system of English which some of his order affect. With a little taste—Myra Brandreth's taste, for instance, her fine ap-

preciation of form and colour—the spacious orderly mansion might be made beautiful. In its present bare and formal condition it is more like the cardboard model of a house than a house where people live. Lord Earlswood goes into the drawing-room—a lofty apartment, with a superb cornice, five long windows, a marble mantelpiece by Flaxman, and nothing else for the eye to dwell upon. The furniture is meagre and stiff, the drapery is dull and heavy; not an enlivening apartment, by any means. There stands Lady Earlswood's harmonium—that instrument which has known only hymn tunes, which never in its wasted life breathed the melody of Mozart, or swelled with the mighty harmonies of Beethoven, or sung in dulcet tones the plaintive strains of Mendelssohn.

Miss Gregory follows her victim into that cheerless drawing-room; she is not going to let him off too easily. Loyalty to the dead, and an innate love of making herself unpleasant, which is a feature of Miss Gregory's character, demand that his life should be made a burden to him for the next hour and a half.

‘Perhaps, Lord Earlswood, in the brief hour that you are able to spare from the giddy vortex of fashionable life, you would like to hear the particulars of my beloved patroness’s last illness?’ she begins with stately civility, as Lord Earlswood walks about the room and looks out of the five windows, with the air of expecting to see a different landscape from each.

‘Thank you, ma’am,’ he says, in his blunt fashion; ‘I don’t particularly care about hearing descriptions of illnesses. It can’t do any good, you see, dwelling upon that kind of thing; and it’s very painful for all parties.’

‘Not to me,’ replied Miss Gregory, removing a solitary tear from the bony bridge of her nose with a black-bordered handkerchief. ‘I love to talk of that saintly soul; it relieves my bursting heart.’ And Miss Gregory breathes hard, and gives a gasp, which seems to indicate that her dress is too tight across the chest.

‘She—she did not suffer much in her last illness, I hope?’ says Lord Earlswood gently.

‘She was buoyed up by a mind superior to mor-



tal agony,' answers Miss Gregory. 'Humanly speaking, her complaint was a trying one, but her burden was lightened for her.'

'I'm glad to hear it. She had doctors who understood her case, I hope?'

'She had the best that human science could afford. They understood her case well enough; but there was not one of them lofty-minded enough to understand *her*—blessed martyr!'

Lord Earlswood's patience suddenly deserts him; and he turns somewhat sharply upon Miss Gregory—so sharply that, the lady's eyes being fixed in the gaze of abstraction, he almost makes her jump.

'Perhaps, when I inform you that I consider your manner of referring to my late wife is very offensive to me, you'll be kind enough not to repeat it,' he remarks sternly. 'My lawyers and Lady Earlswood's lawyers know the terms of our separation; and they know that her ladyship had no cause for complaint, either as to my liberality in monetary matters, or my willingness to make any arrangements conducive to her happiness. I don't

understand being lectured in my own house by a stranger.'

'A stranger to you personally perhaps, Lord Earlswood, but not a stranger to your lamented wife, or to the sorrows that wrung that trusting heart.'

'We'll drop that part of the question, if you please, ma'am,' interjects his lordship.

'I had the honour to be Lady Earlswood's bosom friend and confidential adviser for five blessed years,' continues Miss Gregory; 'I am not likely to forget her.'

'I am glad to hear it. She has left you a pension, I hope?'

'She has left me five hundred pounds. Her modest way of living, her temperate habits and self-denying nature, enabled her to save money.'

'Very creditable to her ladyship,' replies Lord Earlswood. 'The house doesn't look as if it had been kept up in a very extravagant manner,' he adds, glancing round the bare-looking room with a shudder.

There are no costly trifles scattered on tables, no

new books or magazines, no hothouse flowers, nothing that indicates taste or outlay.

‘She was superior to the frivolities of her sex,’ says Miss Gregory, removing another tear. These solitary drops ooze from her eyes at regular intervals, as if by clockwork.

‘I think, if you’ve no objection, I’ll take a stroll round the place,’ says Lord Earlswood, looking at his watch; ‘and if you’ll tell them to cook me a chop, I should be obliged. I’ve had nothing to eat since I left the steamer.’

Miss Gregory bows her head in dismal assent. She rings the bell, and Rogers appears, to whom Lord Earlswood communicates his desire for a chop.

‘It shall be ready in half an hour, my lord,’ replies Rogers briskly; and Lord Earlswood opens one of the drawing-room windows and goes out on the terrace, inwardly rejoicing at his escape from Miss Gregory. She cannot very well follow him out of doors, and he has done his best to make her understand that her conversation is uncongenial. But Miss Gregory is a person who has never tried to make herself congenial to any one. She has gone through

life laying down the law, and letting worldly-minded people know her mean opinion of them.

She watches the departing nobleman as he strolls away, regretting that he has got out of her clutches.

‘Ah,’ she sighs, ‘he is master here now. The children of Belial will soon take their pleasure in this house, which has been the scene of such holy work.’

She breathes this lament with a recollection of prayer-meetings and missionary preachings that have been held in the spacious drawing-room. Evangelical noblemen have held forth here, to the delight of a mixed congregation, some of whom considered it a condescension in a peer to be so anxious about getting to heaven. A man of his exalted position might naturally be content with earth, and leave his future existence to take care of itself; feeling very sure, like the French Marquise of the old *régime*, that the Great Judge would think twice before condemning so august a sinner.

Lord Earlswood perambulates the stately garden, which has been maintained in perfect order, but barely and meagrely, with none of the improvements of modern horticulture. He surveys his patrimonial

domain in the soft summer dusk, and thinks of the change which his wife's death has made in his life. He is a free man from to-night—free to marry Myra Brandreth.

His breath comes quickly at the thought; it is as if the gates of paradise were opened to him. His narrow soul has concentrated its affections upon this one object. So far as it is possible for a man not great in himself to love greatly, he so loves Myra. There is no selfishness in his thoughts of her. He does not consider that he will be doing her a favour by making her a peeress. He thinks of her humbly, with an almost infantine simplicity.

‘Will she marry me?’ he asks himself. ‘She is so cold—so difficult to understand. I do not even know if she cares for me. What hope or favour has she ever given me in return for my slavish devotion? She is gracious enough at times; at times barely civil. How can a fellow reckon up such a woman as that? Sometimes I think she delights in torturing me—in testing her power. But I know that all the good days of my life have been spent with her, and that I am miserable out of her company.’

He circumambulates the lake, and contemplates the swans pensively. They do not approach him with any expectation of being fed, after the manner of more favoured birds. Feeding swans is one of the frivolities to which the late Lady Earlswood has been superior.

‘There’s that fellow Westray,’ pursues his lordship. ‘I have sometimes fancied she was fond of him; but that could hardly be, since there was nothing to prevent his marrying her instead of Miss Morcombe. And then how coolly she took the announcement of his marriage! No, there can’t have been any attachment between those two, in spite of my suspicions. I believe she has flirted with him sometimes, on purpose to make me wretched. It’s a way women have, when they know that a fellow would go through fire and water for them.’

The result of Lord Earlswood’s musings is a determination to propose to Myra immediately. There must be no suspense now that he is a free man. He must know his fate at once. They can be married quietly two or three months hence, and travel for the first year or so, before they blaze out

upon society. What a peeress she will make—she who has queened it so well before the eyes of men in her mimic world! How she will beautify yonder Palladian abode! how she will adorn that fine house in Grosvenor-place, which has been let furnished during the greater part of his lordship's married life!

He sees the future before him, radiant with domestic joy, and sees himself the proud and adoring husband of that woman who, in his eyes, is the incarnation of all that is enchanting in womankind. She shines apart, distant from her sisters as a star.

He goes back to the house in about half an hour, takes his modest dinner in the vast gloomy dining-room; and then, having still a quarter of an hour to spare, perambulates the mansion with Rogers, whom he keeps with him as a buffer, in case of any further attack from Miss Gregory.

‘Dreadful person that woman in black,’ he says. ‘When is she going away, Rogers?’

‘I can’t say, my lord. Her boxes is not packed, though Mrs. Meaves, the housekeeper, gave her a hint yesterday, letting drop something to the effect

of not supposing as she'd stay after the funeral. Perhaps if your lordship—'

'No,' cries his lordship energetically, 'I'll have no more to say to her. She may stay here for another month if she likes, but I won't enter into any discussion with her. You may write me word when she clears out.'

'Yes, my lord. I hope, my lord,' adds Rogers, clearing his throat, 'that your lordship may be thinking of occupying Redhill yourself before long.'

'It's not unlikely, Rogers. But I should make considerable alterations and improvements before I came to live here. The place has a dreary look, to my eye.'

'Begging your pardon, my lord, but things have been kept up in rather a dreary manner. Miss Gregory has had the ordering of almost everything in the household, and she's very near.'

'She looks it,' says Lord Earlswood. 'Well, Rogers, things will be different when I come to live here.'

'Yes, my lord, thank Heavings! We shall all look forward to the change.'



‘In the mean time matters will go on quietly. The housekeeper can write to me for cheques as she wants them. You can tell the head-gardener that I should like to see the flower-beds looking a little gayer when I come here again. *Calceolaria* and things, you know—plenty of yellows and reds; and some of those variegated leafy things one sees at South Kensington—look rather like mixed pickles, you know.’

‘Yes, my lord. Her ladyship was against spending money on the garden, and Mr. M’Clacharty was obliged to manage the best way he could. He was hard pushed, poor man, to keep his cuttings alive through the frosty weather. Miss Gregory said it was a sin to burn coals for greenhouses, when so many human beings were perishing from cold.’

‘Did she give coals to the human beings?’ asks his lordship.

‘Well, no, my lord, not out of her own pocket; and she set her face against my lady providing for the bodily wants of the poor, when their souls required so much looking after.’

‘I see,’ replies Lord Earlswood. ‘That kind of

charity never goes beyond people's souls. The benevolence that deals in beef and bread is a vulgar virtue compared with it.'

The brougham is ready by this time, and Lord Earlswood drives away, Miss Gregory surveying his departure from her chamber-window, as Elaine watched Lancelot. And his lordship hears the stealthy raising of the sash, and knows that Miss Gregory is watching him ; and Miss Gregory, quick in divination, although not moved thereto by so tender a passion as Elaine's, knows that his lordship knows that she knows that he knows—

No, no one less than the Laureate or Lord Dunderary can manage that kind of thing.

Enough that Lord Earlswood steps into his brougham without looking up at the fair watcher, and

' This was the one discourtesy that he used.'

## CHAPTER VIII.

‘ Out on thee ! Seeming ! I will write against it :  
You seem to me as Dian in her orb,  
As chaste as is the bud ere it be blown.

\* \* \* \* \*

How comes it now, my husband, O, how comes it,  
That thou art thus estranged from thyself ?  
Thyself, I call it, being strange to me,  
That, undividable, incorporate,  
Am better than thy dear self’s better part.’

THE authorities of Ostend take the stranger’s clay, as it were, into custody, and do all that is needful to be done after so sudden and awful an end of a life not without social importance, the authorities being speedily made acquainted with the fact that the late Hamilton Lyndhurst has been an English financier of great wealth, and a person who has done them honour by dying in their town. If he shall furthermore consent—by his heirs, executors, and assigns—to be buried in Belgian soil, he will be conferring a still greater obligation on that free country.

There seems to be no one nearly interested in him who had so many flatterers and followers, so few

friends. The flatterers and followers wait on the tip-toe of expectation for the particulars of their patron's will, but they do not rush over to Ostend to lavish their affection on that clay they have so worshipped and caressed while it had breath and motion. He lies alone in the large cheerless room at the hotel, and there is not so much as a dog that loved him living to wail at the door of the dead.

He has come over to Ostend unattended. His valet and his lawyer are the only two people who come to take possession of his remains.

The lawyer's first idea is to carry his departed client back to England and bury him there, as an expensive and gentlemanlike proceeding, appropriate to the late Mr. Lyndhurst's position in the money market; but upon opening Mr. Lyndhurst's will, he finds that his client has especially forbidden this dreary homage to his clay.

'Let there be no religious ceremonial, or as little as possible, at my burial,' he says, almost in the words of his favourite poet, Heinrich Heine, 'and let me be buried in the place where I die. Let no costly cenotaph record my empty existence, or publish its

lying tribute to virtues I have neither possessed nor pretended. If I must have a tombstone, let it be a plain slab of granite, large and massive, inscribed with my name and the dates of my birth and death. That is all the history my barren life affords.'

Then comes the disposition of his property. Bitter, bitter news for those eager flatterers and followers—the jesters, the dancers, the flute-players, his *roués*, as Philip of Orleans called his friends, honouring them, or affecting to honour them, with the belief that they would have suffered themselves to be broken on the wheel for him.

But the Parisians, says Soulaire, took it another way, and said these fine gentlemen were '*véritables espèces, des gens dignes d'être roués.*'

After a decent provision for all his servants who shall have lived with him three years at the time of his decease, Hamilton Lyndhurst leaves his estate, real and personal, pictures, porcelain, plate, furniture, horses, carriages, books, jewelry to be realised within a twelvemonth of his death, and the proceeds thereof equally divided between the Asylum for Idiots and the Hospital for Incurables. By not so much as the

bequest of a mourning ring does he acknowledge the virtues of his train.

The investigation of the circumstances attending Mr. Lyndhurst's death which the dead man's solicitor deems it his duty to make is a sore trial for Herman. The Belgian law requires no inquest, and the Belgian authorities are easily satisfied; but the solicitor affects a deep interest in the details of his client's death, and begs to be allowed to question Mrs. Westray upon the subject. The gossip of the hotel has made him acquainted with the curious circumstances that preceded Hamilton Lyndhurst's death. He has been told how Mrs. Westray arrived in the early morning, and was shown straight to the apartment of an English traveller, who had not given his name, but had stated that he was there to meet his wife, whom he expected by the Dover boat. He has been told how the newly-risen household was disturbed by the lady's shrieks, and how the English stranger was found lying dead at her feet.

Mrs. Westray declares herself willing to answer any inquiries Mr. Lomax, the solicitor, may wish to ask; and Herman, not seeing his way to the avoidance

of such inquiries, allows Mr. Lomax the desired interview. Quietly and succinctly Editha relates how she came to Ostend in answer to a telegram sent in her husband's name—came expecting to find him ill at that hotel, and that she found herself face to face with Hamilton Lyndhurst.

‘Do you suppose that my lamented client sent you the telegram?’ asks the lawyer.

‘I can but suppose so.’

‘Have you any idea of his motive in sending such a message?’

‘That is a question which I would rather not answer.’

‘And it is a question to which I strongly object,’ Herman interposes.

‘Will you allow me to see the telegram?’ asks the lawyer.

‘I have lost it,’ Editha answers calmly.

She confronts her questioner like a statue, marble pale, but calmer than most women would seem in such a position.

The solicitor drops his eyelids and contemplates his boots for the next few moments benignly, a look

that he is in the habit of assuming after having put a trying question to a client of the weaker sex. Then he casts a furtive glance at the husband, who sits immovable, gloomily watchful. This inability of Mrs. Westray's to produce the telegram seems to Mr. Lomax somewhat like Desdemona's helplessness in the matter of that strawberry-spotted handkerchief. And very likely Mrs. Westray is as innocent as Desdemona, poor thing, if one could only know all the facts of the case, though circumstances do point very strongly to an opposite conclusion.

Mr. Lomax has telegraphed to London for a surgeon of some standing, and this English surgeon has made a post-mortem examination in conjunction with the Belgian surgeon who was called in on the fatal morning. Medical science has laid bare the cause of Mr. Lyndhurst's death. There is nothing suspicious or mysterious in that event; no hint of foul play. There was organic disease of the heart, say the surgeons, of long standing. Whenever or wherever the end had come, it would in all probability have been just as sudden as it has been. Excitement, a mental shock of any kind, may have hastened the



evil hour, but the end has been inevitable for a long time.

Mr. Lomax (Lomax and Lomax, Viaduct-buildings, E.C.) professes himself grateful to Mrs. Westray for her amiable candour. 'Curious business, this about the telegram, and of course very painful for the lady involved. Eccentric fellow, poor Lyndhurst, always,' says the solicitor blandly. But Mr. Lomax is not prepared to admit that the telegram was actually sent by his deplored client, unless Mrs. Westray is herself assured upon that point.

'I know nothing, except that I was brought to this place by a most malicious falsehood, and that by God's help my husband was here before me.'

After this there is no more to be said. Mr. Lomax is profusely apologetic for his intrusion, and retires, taking with him the conviction that death's dark curtain has fallen prematurely upon a drama that might have developed into a very stirring domestic tragedy. It is Mr. Lomax's misfortune to contemplate life turned the seamy side without, and to be anything rather than an optimist.

## CHAPTER IX.

‘Forsake me not thus. Witness, Heaven,  
What love sincere and reverence in my heart  
I bear thee, and unweeting have offended,  
Unhappily deceived! Thy suppliant,  
I beg and clasp thy knees; bereave me not,  
Whereon I live, thy gentle looks, thy aid,  
Thy counsel in this uttermost distress—  
My only strength and stay.’

THERE is a strange coldness in Herman’s manner to his wife, reunited to him under circumstances so desperate. In her manner to him there is a quiet akin to apathy; pale, silent, uncomplaining, she lies on the sofa in the cheerless unhomelike room, littered with Herman’s open portmanteau, travelling-bag, rug, and scattered papers as only a man can litter a room which he inhabits but for a few hours.

She lies with her face hidden from the light, content for the moment with the luxury of rest. Her brain has been so racked, her heart so tortured, she has feared and suffered so intensely within

these last broken days and nights—the actual sum of hours she knows not—that there is no room in her brain for further anguish. Of troubles to come, of evil threatening her future, she takes no heed. Herman is safe and near her, and the horror of that awful half-hour in Hamilton Lyndhurst's room is swept away like a thunder-cloud which has enfolded her for a moment with peril of sudden fiery death, and then has driven past, and left her scatheless.

The dead man in his room yonder—that quiet clay so innocent of harm—marble face that a sinless child might kiss, placid brow with a look of ineffable repose, folded hands as in prayer—hands that perchance for thirty years have never been so folded—is *that* Hamilton Lyndhurst? She cannot link this solemn image with the bold bad man who stood before her a little while ago, audaciously confessing the treachery that had brought her to his presence. She lies resting, and now and then trying uneasily to solve that problem, how these two—the harmless dead and the wicked living—can be one and the same; while Herman paces to and fro, in and out of a door that leads into the adjoining room.

His bedroom is one of a suite, and he has engaged the two additional rooms now for his wife's comfortable accommodation.

She hears him give the order about these rooms, and wonders that he should care to remain any longer at this Ostend hotel. For her own part, she is nervously anxious to escape from a scene whose every association is horrible. Nor can she imagine any reason for delay.

‘Why should we stay here, Herman?’ she asks. ‘I long to get back to baby.’

‘No doubt. Separation from my son must be a sore affliction to you,’ says her husband in that new tone of his which strikes so harshly on her ear.

‘We might go back to-night, Herman. There is nothing to detain us in this horrid place.’

‘I beg your pardon. I do not think you are strong enough to travel; and my own plans are unsettled just now. Until they are a little clearer I think it best for us to remain where we are.’

He says no more, but closes the door behind him, and leaves her to wonder at his strangeness.

She is too weak just at first for any feeling beyond

a blank vague wonder. She lies thinking of the change in her husband idly, dreamily, with an undefined sense of trouble and uneasiness. He is tired, perhaps; his brain disturbed and confused, as hers is; worn out by long watches at the scene of war; harassed by the thought of financial trouble at home. There are so many reasons to account for that strangeness in his manner.

‘And yet it seems hard that he should be unkind to me in this time of trouble, when I have such need of all his love,’ she thinks piteously.

By and by, when that dull stupor of actual physical fatigue has worn off a little, painful thoughts take a stronger hold of her.

‘Why should he be unkind—he who has never spoken coldly to me before to-day?’ she asks herself; and suddenly, in a breath, there flashes upon her the memory of that hideous word whispered in her ear as they left the dead man’s room:

‘Lover—your lover!’

She starts up from her sofa, pale to the lips, but with resolution lighting up her face, and goes into the adjoining room. Herman is seated in a despond-

ent attitude by the table, his head leaning on his folded arms, his face hidden.

She goes softly to him, kneels by his side, and lays her hand upon his arm.

‘Herman, Herman, my husband, my dearest, what is this cloud between us? Look at me, love; speak to me!’

He lifts his head, and turns a haggard face towards her, but his eyes are lowered gloomily, and refuse to meet hers.

‘Is there any need for me to tell you what is amiss between us?’ he asks. ‘Pray do not affect surprise. Do not let there be any acting on either side. There is nothing left for us but to confront calamity calmly. You have nothing to fear from me. I love you too well to inflict disgrace upon your name, or to cause you unnecessary pain. No newspaper shall ever tell the world the causes of our parting—scandal’s avid ear shall never be gratified by the details of my wrongs or your—folly; but we are not the less parted, Editha’—his voice falters at the name—‘for ever and for evermore.’

She rises to her feet and confronts him proudly,

a crimson spot burning in each pale cheek, shame's bitter red.

'Herman, you cannot be so wild—so wicked—as to believe that I—'

The words choke her.

'Unhappily there are facts which admit but of one construction,' answers her husband in that cold altered voice of his. 'I find you here—alone—with that dead man. Can I doubt, as a reasoning being in the full possession of my senses, that you had come here to meet him?'

'As I live,' she answers, with an upward look which makes the words seem an appeal to Heaven, 'I came here in answer to a telegram sent in your name—came to my sick husband—came and found myself the dupe of a lying message. That dead man knows the rest, and God who hears me knows my innocence.'

'Are you not afraid of another thunderbolt like that which scared Vivien when she lied as boldly as you lie now?' asks Herman bitterly. 'Do you know that I had hints of what was to happen to me? I was brought to this place by a friendly warning;

some tool or servant of yours or of your lover's betrayed your plans. Yes, I was told that you were to meet him here. I was informed that he had been like your shadow at Lochwithian—a man I ought to have feared at the outset, knowing what I knew of him, but his cunning was deep enough to hoodwink me. And then I did myself the honour to think you as high above such a tempter as the evening star is above the reach of Satan grovelling in his nethermost hell. A foolish mistake. Other men's experience should have taught me that all women are alike—beautiful pictures, smiling, innocent, supernal; but who shall say what foul lining backs the canvas, what obscene devilry hides behind the saintly image ?'

'You knew that I was to meet Mr. Lyndhurst ?' asks Editha, bewildered.

'Yes. I had letters; the first telling me of Lyndhurst's visit to Lochwithian, and recommending me to be on my guard. I laughed at this warning, secure in my belief in you. The next letter spoke more plainly, and told me to come to this place without delay, if I wanted to know the truth. I came,



but could discover nothing. Your friend was here under a false name ; you were not in the house. I made myself sure of that before I lay down to get a few hours' sleep—such sleep, God help me ! I was awakened by your screams.'

'The same person who sent me the telegram may have sent you the letters. Anonymous letters, of course. We have been enmeshed in a web of lies, both of us. Perhaps that other is a lie too—a lie, though it came to me in your own handwriting.

'What do you mean ?'

'Herman, you accuse me of falsehood. You believe—you, who should know every thought of my mind, every instinct of my heart—you believe that I am so vile a creature as to have sacrificed home and child, honour, name, love, my hope of heaven, my peace here and hereafter, at the bidding of that sinful man who died at my feet ! I—who, till that miserable man bared his wicked heart before me, hardly knew that this world contained so much infamy. You think that I am vile enough to transfer my heart from you to him as I would change my glove ! You do not know me well enough to know

that I am yours to the core of my heart—that I have not—never can have—a hope or desire on earth that does not begin and end in you, our child, and the dear ones at home.’

‘I know nothing except that you were with that man. If he had not fallen dead at your feet, you might be far away from this place now—his mistress, happy, resplendent, laughing at your deserted husband. Fate has played you a sorry turn; and you, who might have been as magnificent as Cleopatra, are now reduced to the Magdalen’s penitence and tears.’

In his bitterness of heart he cannot wound her too deeply; he can find no words cruel enough to express the keenness of his own pain. In his agony he is merciless.

‘Were you sinless yourself you could hardly be more bitter, Herman,’ says Editha with a sad smile, half scorn, half pity. ‘Yet I have a letter written by you to a woman you loved before you married me—a letter which proves you as false as a husband as you believe I have been as a wife.’

‘A letter written by me—a letter from me to any

woman since I have been your husband! Except business letters, which might be published to the world, I have written to no woman since I married you. So help me, Heaven!

‘O Herman, for pity’s sake! God’s wrath is swift to overtake false oaths. I have the letter in my travelling-bag—the shameful cruel letter, telling her that you have loved her always, that all other love has been a delusion, asking her to share your life—life without her is worthless!’

‘Are you mad, Editha? Show me this letter. Or perhaps you have lost it, like the telegram. You may have a knack of losing compromising documents.’

‘I have not lost it.’

‘Let me see it, then. It is a forgery, I tell you before looking at it. A trick of your late admirer’s, perhaps—one of the various treacheries that are fair in love or war.’

‘It is no forgery, Herman,’ she answers sadly. ‘I know your hand too well. If there had been room for doubt, I should never have believed.’ She goes into the next room, and returns almost immedi-

ately, bringing him the half sheet of paper, which she has taken from the portfolio in her travelling-bag. He reads the lines with a curious smile.

‘It is your writing, is it not, Herman?’

‘Every word of it. Yes, Mrs. Westray, I certainly wrote this, and, what is more, I went so far as to have it set up in type, and you would by and by, had you continued to be interested in my dramatic labours, have heard the lines spoken in public. It is the rough draft of a letter from Colonel St. Vincent, the hero of my last comedy, to Lady Madeline Rayner, whom he loves. You will find the style polished and strengthened in the printed version, I hope, if you ever take the trouble to read my play, but you will discover that the letter is essentially the same.’

‘And this letter was not written to Mrs. Brandreth?’

‘No more than it was written to you, or the Archbishop of Canterbury. It was written one Sunday afternoon in Mrs. Brandreth’s drawing-room, discussed with her, as a point in my play, approved by her, and then written a second time by me, as

there were weak points in this first notion. You know I do not often make two copies of the same idea—neither my leisure nor my humour serve for this niceness—but stage letters are hard writing, and I was anxious this one should have a natural tone. Yes, you will find the printed version better.’

He hands her the paper with supreme coolness—coldness tinctured with contempt.

‘Your counter-charge is wanting in force,’ he says with biting irony; ‘an author’s wife ought to have known a folio of copy. Women who receive love-letters of a compromising character do not usually leave them lying about for other people to pick up. You should know this, for you have been careful that I should never find any letters of Lyndhurst’s to you.’

‘Mr. Lyndhurst never wrote to me in my life,’ she answers.

‘Indeed! A man of vast experience, and wiser than his generation. He knew the safety of oral communication.’ A moment ago and she has been ready to fall on her knees at his feet and beseech his pardon for having doubted him, even though his own handwriting was his accuser. But at these

words of insult her pride kindles, she recoils from him as if he had struck her. At the door she pauses, her hand on the lock, and looks at him more in wonder than in resentment.

‘Does all our life together count for so little, Herman? I have no more to say. No, I will not stoop to defend myself. You will know some day. You will be sorry some day.’

‘That is what a good many women have said in their time,’ answers Herman, that pale pained face of his quite unmoved. ‘And the day has not come yet. Messalina and Faustina and a few more are waiting for it in Hades—the day that shall make their names white in the eyes of men.’

## CHAPTER X.

‘ Call me a fool ;  
Trust not my reading nor my observations,  
Which with experimental seal doth warrant  
The tenor of my book ; trust not my age,  
My reverence, calling, nor divinity,  
If this sweet lady lie not guiltless here  
Under some biting error.’

‘ Dieu n’a pas a pardonner. Il est plus grand que cela, il efface ! Nous qui ne pouvons rien effacer, nous avons inventé le pardon qui punit, puisqu’il rabaisse.’

Yes, Herman Westray, guided by that blatant counsellor worldly wisdom, founding his judgment upon experience of life, has decided against the woman who appeared to him three years ago the incarnation of womanly purity. The very thought of her innocence then weighs against her in his mind now.

‘ God help me !’ he says to himself as he paces the darkened room in the hotel at Ostend. He has closed the heavy venetian shutters, glad to exclude the garish unsympathetic sun, glaring at him in fierce September brightness, if he ventures to put

his head out of the window. Blue sky above, blue sea below; white houses on either side; and a holiday crowd going to and fro yonder on the digue, or bobbing up and down in particoloured raiment in the sea; holiday music blaring on a brazen band; a foolish unreasoning joyfulness everywhere, as it seems to this man, stung to the heart, his household gods shattered, his life brought suddenly to a standstill, his future blotted out: for the man who has lost hope has no future. What is man's notion of his earthly future but a mirage picture painted by Hope upon the sands of life? And how often it happens, as the wanderer advances, that the picture vanishes and the barren sands remain.

‘God help me!’ exclaims Herman. ‘It is generally this kind of woman—an innocent guileless smiling creature—who takes a sudden turn some day, and astonishes every one by going utterly to the bad. A woman of the world would have flirted with Lyndhurst, made him her slave, bled him of opera tickets and hothouse flowers, French gloves and fans, and laughed his advances to scorn. My wife sits by her fireside with her baby in her lap while that devil



talks to me, and never by so much as a look or a tone betrays his influence upon her—marble could not seem colder, or snow purer; yet one fine morning she bolts with him, or comes here to meet him, which is quite as bad and a little more artful. And he is dead—dead,’ reiterates Herman savagely, ‘and I can never wring the truth from his false throat. Death steps between us, and cheats me of my just revenge.’

Not without some deliberation, even though his passion has not cooled yet, has Herman condemned his wife. He has turned that story of hers about in his mind, and he cannot believe her. He cannot believe that Hamilton Lyndhurst would have brought her to this place like a snared bird. There is a wild romance in the act—treacherous, vile as it is—which seems to him impossible in these latter days of easy-going sin. The Lovelace of the nineteenth century wins his Clarissa without soiling his fingers. No dirty tools, no roundabout or subterranean ways are needful to the accomplishment of his victory. He speaks, and she hears. Express trains, continental seclusion, and the Divorce Court do the rest.

‘Lyndhurst was not a man to snare an unwilling victim,’ he tells himself.

What is he to do? Believing this wife, so dearly loved, so entirely trusted one little week ago—believing her guilty at least in intention, guilty of abandoning him and heaven for the love of that dead profligate—what is he to do? His first and most abiding thought is how best to shield her, how best to save her from the shame her sin has too well deserved—to suppress the scandal that is too likely to arise from her presence at that awful death scene—to sever himself from her for life, yet spare her the disgrace of separation.

Not without some leaven of selfishness in his weaker hours, he is, in this crisis of his life, utterly unselfish. It is of his wife he thinks, of her welfare, her good name, and he is ready for any sacrifice that can serve and shield her.

‘I will exile myself,’ he thinks. ‘Heaven knows, London, England, all familiar places will be hateful to me after this bitter blow. I will never go back any more. Let them sell me up at Fulham, and my name appear in the *Gazette*, and let my good friends

and the public believe that I have run away from my creditors—that I am an outlaw, afraid to face English respectability. The world is wide enough. I shall be a shade less miserable a thousand miles from civilisation. And then her good name will not suffer. She will go home to her father, and society will compassionate the victim instead of stoning the sinner. I don't know, for my own part, which is hardest to bear, the stoning or the compassion; but she is a woman, and may be able to endure pity.'

He stops in his rapid walk up and down—holds himself by the hair of his head, as if he were trying to reduce his feverish brain to order by that rough handling, and bethinks himself what next he should do for her welfare.

They two cannot spend many hours more of life together. To see that sad sweet face—to know her lost to him, yet know her near—to see the temple that once was lighted by so fair and pure a spirit, and know that the soul within that lovely form is spotted and defiled,—this is too deep an agony.

'She must go to Lochwithian,' he thinks; 'Fulham means home no longer. She must go back to

her father, and her father must be told that I am a fool and a swindler, and that exile is unavoidable for me for the next few years. They will be glad to have her back in their peaceful valley. And she will go to church twice a day, and visit the sick, and wipe out her sin with many tears and prayers and good works, and be happy again, perhaps, by and by, when time has blunted the edge of pain, and she can look back at her married life as if it were a bad dream dimly remembered. Poor soul, poor soul! And we began life so gaily two years ago, and meant to be so happy together.'

The memory of that glad beginning moves him to tears, the first he has shed. Bitter, unaccustomed tears, which rend him as the evil spirits tore at the soul of their victim before they loosed their grip.

He must send her back to her father, under safe conduct; but with whom? Has he, has she, any friend to be trusted in such an emergency?

Yes, there is one he fancies he may safely confide in—one who from first to last has shown himself friendly, honest, faithful—Richard Dewrance,

dignified by his sacred calling, a man who knows the world, and can answer the voice of slander, should it assail Mrs. Westray by and by.

Herman's mind is made up quickly on this point. Dewrance is the friend who can help him now. He goes out at once and telegraphs to the curate of St. Januarius, begging him to come to Ostend immediately, if he wishes to do Mrs. Westray a great service.

'That poor fellow would go to the end of the world for Editha's sake,' thinks Herman, remembering Dewrance's tacit adoration of Miss Morcombe, and his heroic resignation in the hour of his rival's triumph.

Dewrance, a man who knows the world, and who can hold his tongue—two strong points in a friend.

At seven o'clock next morning Richard Dewrance and Herman Westray are seated face to face at the breakfast-table. That meal has been ordered for the traveller, who has not long disembarked from the Dover boat. Herman drinks a cup of coffee, but can eat nothing. He has been up all night,

feverish, unresting, and has spent the dismal hours betwixt night and morning on the quay, waiting for the arrival of the packet, feeling very sure that the curate will be prompt to obey his summons. Dewrance is horror-struck at the change in him, now that he sees him in the full light of the newly-risen sun.

‘Why, in mercy’s name, Westray, what has happened? What have you been doing to yourself? Is there anything wrong—is your wife ill?’ asks Dewrance.

‘My wife is—well. Make your mind easy on that point.’

‘Thank God! I thought the best answer to your telegram was to come as fast as the steamer would bring me—no use wasting money on a reply. And now tell me what’s the matter. Money difficulties, of course—I’ve heard rumours—and you want my advice.’

‘Hardly, for my mind is made up. I won’t insult you by pretending to ask for counsel when my plan is irrevocably formed. What I want from you is help to carry out my plan.’

Herman proceeds to explain himself, but somewhat lamely. He tells Dewrance the story which he wishes Dewrance to tell Mr. Morcombe and the polite world by and by—tells him a story of debt and difficulty and enforced exile.

‘And you are going to send your wife home, to eat her heart in that solitary valley, while you roam about the Continent like a modern Wandering Jew, with the certainty of ultimately landing yourself at Homburg or Monaco and going speedily to the dogs. My dear fellow, I think from the lips of reason I never heard so preposterous a scheme, and an Anglican priest in a fashionable neighbourhood has considerable experience of human folly, I can assure you.’

‘Call me a fool, if you like, Dewrance. My mind is made up.’

‘You want to break your wife’s heart, and go to the bad yourself, because you happen to have outrun the constable, when all you have to do is to look your difficulties straight in the face, meet them and conquer them like a man. Nobody’s creditors are harsh or implacable nowadays; they have only

to see that their debtor means honestly, and they will roar like sucking doves. Put yourself in my hands, that's a good fellow. The bill of sale is an awkward business, I confess, and unless your publisher will help you out of that difficulty, I fear you must lose your furniture. But what of that? You can rub along in furnished lodgings very well for a year or two, and will live as cheaply again as you have been living, without the burden of a house and servants. As for Mrs. Westray, she loves you too well to—'

That last half sentence stabs Herman to the heart. His fortitude abandons him for a moment, and Dewrance sees the real state of the case before he has recovered his composure.

'She loves me so well that she and I will be better apart for the rest of our lives,' he exclaims bitterly.

'Westray!' cries the curate, 'this talk about your creditors is all bosh. You have quarrelled with your wife.'

'No; there has been no quarrel—not a word, not a breath. When she left me six weeks ago to



go to Lochwithian, and laid her head upon my breast, and looked up at me with her loving tearful eyes, I thought there was nothing on this wicked earth so fair and pure and true as my wife; and now—'

He breaks down altogether here, and angrily dashes the unwilling tears from his eyes.

'And now she is just as fair and true and pure as when you parted from her,' says the curate, with conviction. 'Purity and Editha are inseparable.'

Herman turns from his counsellor impatiently, paces the room for a minute or two, and then comes back to him.

'Dewrance,' he says impetuously, 'can I trust you?'

'I am a priest,' answers Dewrance. 'That is answer enough. But let there be no half-confidence. Trust me all in all, or not at all.'

'I will tell you everything; yes, though it condemns her.'

He tells the story of that awful night, not so many hours ago, when all is said, but making a barrier between the hopeful past and the hopeless

future strong as those gates of adamant by which Sin and Death keep their eternal watch and ward. He tells all, and pronounces his wife's condemnation.

Dewrance listens with grave attention, and says not a word till Herman has finished.

'She gives you a very simple reason for her presence here,' he says at last. 'Why do you not believe her?'

'Because the fiction is too palpable, and I had been warned. While I was with the French army at Sedan I received a letter in a strange hand, telling me that if I came to this hotel on such a night I should make a discovery which concerned me deeply. I had my information.'

'From an anonymous letter,' replies Dewrance contemptuously. 'No one but a scoundrel ever writes an anonymous letter, or puts his pen to paper to the injury of a woman's character. Now you can hardly expect unalloyed truth from a scoundrel, yet you choose to believe the anonymous libeller in preference to your wife. Now I, who have not had the honour to be Miss Morcombe's husband, choose to believe in her purity; yes, and would so believe,

though all the voices of this earth united to condemn her,' adds the curate, with a little burst of passion.

Herman seizes him by the hand vehemently.

'You are a good fellow, Dewrance. Upon my soul, I think you are right! Yes, it is hard to believe her less than we have thought her—less than the best and purest among women. But to find her here—with that man? If you knew his character as I do—'

'Yet you admitted him to your house?'

'Yes; because I thought my wife like Una—above and beyond contagion; and believed that even he, at his worst, would respect such purity.'

'Such men respect nothing. Now, Westray, be reasonable. Instead of this pig-headed idea of yours, that a woman whom you have known and honoured as the purest of her sex could go to destruction all of a sudden at the beck of a profligate, call reason and experience to your aid. You have known her pure and true and unselfish and devoted—high-principled and religious. Trust your past experience of her character, and leave me to unearth the mystery of the tele-

gram. And now go—go to your wife, and ask her to forgive you for having doubted her, if she knows that you have doubted her.’

‘If she knows? She knows too well! I have been brutal to her,’ says Herman gloomily. ‘If she is stainless—as you believe, as I hope—she can never forgive me. I have said the bitterest things in my blind rage. I have been cruel, senseless, inexcusable, unless I am justified in all I said.’

‘She will forgive you as Heaven forgives,’ replies Dewrance. ‘She is all sweetness and pity and pardon. Go to her.’

‘How can I go to her? how can I bear to look in her eyes, once so true, so fearless, when I half believe she came here—false wife, degraded woman—to meet that man?’

‘No one but a madman could believe that. You have been out of your right mind while you thought it. Go to her—go down on your knees before her, and tell her you have been mad, and are sane again. I pledge myself to make all things clear. I will find the writer of those libellous letters. I will trace the sender of the telegram. I do not

ask you to take your wife to your heart again till I have succeeded; but I do ask you to seek for pardon from an offended woman, whose purity you have outraged.'

Herman, who has gone a little way towards the door of his wife's room, hesitates, only half convinced.

'I will take her to Lochwithian, if you like,' adds Dewrance. 'You have no home for her. I will see her safe with her father and sister; but I will do nothing till you have obtained her pardon. I will not let her leave this house under the shadow of unmerited suspicion. In this at least I claim the authority of a brother, and will see her righted.'

'You are an honest fellow, Dewrance. Yes; I will go to her, and will apologise for—my brutality. I ought to have been more courteous—even if—even—'

He cannot finish the sentence, but opens the door suddenly, and enters the adjoining room.

Editha is standing by the window, looking out at the sea smiling up at the morning sky. All is bright and gay without—within there is the heavy

gloom of despair. She turns her pallid face towards her husband almost for the first time in her life without a smile. Hopelessly sad are the heavy eyes; but the steady truthful gaze is unchanged.

‘Editha,’ begins Herman, going up to her slowly, half reluctantly, ‘I have been talking to an old friend of yours, Richard Dewrance.’

‘He here?’ she says with languid surprise.

‘He has convinced me that I have behaved abominably—that I have been harsh—bitter—unnecessarily cruel. That—let circumstances seem to condemn you as they might—I have no right to doubt. Editha, can you forgive me?’

She looks at him for a moment doubtfully, too deeply moved for words.

‘Herman, I have nothing to forgive. I have never been angry; I have only been sorry that you could doubt me—grieved to the very heart. And yet I doubted you—’

A moment more and she is sobbing on his shoulder, clasped to his heart.

‘Yes, dearest, we have each something to pardon; we forgive each other. My darling, my own

true wife, look up. Dewrance is right. I was a lunatic when I doubted you. My sweetest, no more tears. I will find the sender of that accursed telegram, the writer of those devilish letters. Dewrance,' he calls, 'Dewrance, come here, true friend, faithful priest; the cloud has lifted; my darling and I trust each other once more, never to doubt again.'

Dewrance comes in, smiling calmly, and sees the wife leaning on her husband's breast.

'You have been very quick about it,' he says placidly.

## CHAPTER XI.

‘Eusèbe avait déposé sa volonté sur l’étagère de sa maîtresse, parmi d’autres chinoiseries.’

LORD EARLSWOOD calls at the pretty little house in Kensington Gore the morning after his arrival in London. He is quite aware that the proprieties demand a certain delay before his union with Myra, but he wants to have the question settled on the lady’s part with as little loss of time as possible.

‘Let me once know how I stand, and I can go to Scotland and knock about very comfortably for the winter,’ he tells himself; ‘or I shouldn’t mind a cruise in the Mediterranean with old Shlooker. Jolly old bird on board a yacht is old Shlooker; knows the ropes, and can keep a fellow amused; smokes like a furnace, can take the tiller occasionally, and can cook an omelette or an Irish stew, and plays *écarté* better than any man I know—excellent company Shlooker. Yes; I could be quite happy in my mind for the next six months, if I knew that



Myra would have me when the time was up. But I must have things put square upon that point.'

The house in Kensington Gore is wrapped up in brown paper like a toy just sent home from the toy-shop. The matron in charge informs Lord Earlswood that Mrs. Brandreth has gone to 'Eldenbridge, in Beljum.'

'Bless my soul ! when did she go ?'

'About a week ago, sir ; leastways a week come Thursday.'

This is too elaborate a calculation for his lordship.

'Anybody with her ?'

'Nobody but her hown maid, sir.'

'O,' says Lord Earlswood, turning on his heel. 'Vexatious rather,' he says to himself. 'I detest steamers. Good mind to send down to Plymouth for the *Argo*, and take old Shlooker to Belgium. Slow business that though, and I want this question settled at once. I suppose I must put up with the steamer.'

A balloon would be more agreeable to Lord Earlswood, or a submarine railway, or a patent gutta-

percha apparatus. It seems to him a hard thing that, across the Channel, a man with coal-mines and a rent-roll can go no faster than a mere bagman.

‘What could induce Brandreth to choose such a place as Heldenburg for her holidays?’ thinks his lordship, as he drives to his family solicitor to make certain arrangements before starting by that evening’s mail. He knows not how long he may be away, or where he may go; but if it were needful to follow Myra Brandreth over the continent of Europe to obtain an answer to that vital question he is so eager to ask he would so follow her. The Alps would be no barrier, the Balkan range would not stop him.

‘Such a stoopid place to choose,’ he muses; ‘and she’s been there before too. Never go to places where I’ve been before, except Brighton or Paris—absolute waste of time. Curious woman—no accounting for her taste. Likes a thing one day, and detests it the next. Hope I shall find her in a good temper.’

That night’s steamer carries Lord Earlswood to Calais; from Calais a train, with some pretensions

to swiftness, bears him on to Ostend. At Ostend he breakfasts and takes a Turkish bath, arrays himself in fresh-looking gray homespun, puts two or three pairs of lavender gloves in his pocket, sprinkles himself with Ess bouquet, and proceeds by the native leisurely train to Heldenburg.

He remembers his mission to the same place two years ago, when he fancied that, as bearer of the tidings of Herman Westray's marriage, he should discover the state of Mrs. Brandreth's feelings for that gentleman. He had an idea that a woman always fainted, or shrieked, or beat the carpet with the heels of her boot—like the famous Mrs. Pott at Eatanswill—when she heard anything that hurt her feelings. Myra had received his communication with ineffable tranquillity, had looked him in the face and smiled; *ergo* she had never cared for the Benedict. Satisfied upon this point in some measure, Lord Earlswood had been not the less provoked to jealousy by those half *tête-à-têtes* which Herman was permitted to enjoy in the inner drawing-room at Kensington Gore.

Everything at Heldenburg looks just as it did

that last time, as Lord Earlswood goes up the stone steps that divide the quaint and picturesque-looking old town from the brand-new white houses and green venetians of modern Heldenburg. There have been a few more white houses added perhaps within the two years. The terraces fronting the sea have grown a little longer, sandy foundations for more houses are being dug out yonder. Heldenburg has evidently prospered, and is prospering. The rabbits are driven away from the sandy dunes where they did erst disport themselves ; the mussels are getting as scarce as whitebait.

Lord Earlswood proceeds straight to the office of the hotel, where an intelligent female, in the freshest of caps, gives him the information he requires. Mrs. Brandreth occupies an apartment *au premier* in the last house but one to the right.

He is not so fortunate as to see Mrs. Brandreth in the balcony this time, but on reaching the first-floor finds her servant, who shows him into the drawing-room. There is the same satin-lined basket, with the same strip of point-lace on blue cambric, or one very like it ; there are flowers and

books and terra-cotta statuettes. In a word, the stage is dressed with Myra's usual taste, but Myra herself has a worn and faded look, Lord Earlswood thinks, as she enters from the adjoining room, dressed in white cashmere—an opaque creamy white—with her hair loosely arranged, looking like a picture by Whistler.

She is not the less beautiful in his eyes for being a little 'off colour,' for his passion is at that stage, and has long been, when change in the object brings no change in the feeling of the adorer. Were she gradually to become hideous, he would not know it.

His coming is not pleasing to her. He can see that but too plainly; and the sense of her displeasure stings him, knowing that he has come to offer her place and power in the world, with his own heart as a make-weight.

'I'm afraid you're not over glad to see me,' he says; 'yet I came over on purpose to see you.'

'So you did two years ago when you came to tell me of Mr. Westray's marriage,' she answers, sinking wearily into a chair by the open window. She has

the air of being worried, and the hand with which she pushes back the loose hair from her forehead is faintly tremulous. 'You have a mania for rushing about upon wild goosechases. Have you any tremendous news for me to-day?'

'Yes, Myra. My wife is dead, and I am a free man. Didn't you know it?'

'No; I seldom look at the morning papers. I suppose I ought to congratulate you, rather than condole with you, as your marriage was not a happy one.'

He draws his chair near hers, and looks at her earnestly, beseechingly even, a very slave in his devotion to her.

'My first marriage was a miserable one. All the world knows that, though I believe Lady Earlswood was a very good sort of person in her own particular style. But it wasn't my style, you see. What is my next marriage to be like, Myra?'

She laughs nervously.

'I must refer you to the lady you may honour by your choice,' she says. 'I would recommend you to be deliberate in your selection. You have

found your matrimonial chains heavy. There can be no hurry for you to fetter yourself again.'

'Come, Myra, you must know that my choice was made three years ago; that nothing—not even unkindness from the woman I love—could alter my feelings on that point. There never was but one woman who exercised any influence upon my life. There is only one woman who can make me happy: and her name is Myra Brandreth.'

'A dream, a delusion!' exclaims Myra. 'It was all very well to build a theatre for me, and to get rid of your Sunday afternoons in my drawing-room, but you never could have meant anything more than that.'

'I always meant to make you my wife, if Providence ever gave me the opportunity. Don't tell me that you can have the heart to refuse me, Myra, now the chance has come. Don't tell me that you haven't known of my love all along.'

'You are a faithful, devoted creature,' exclaims Myra, looking at him with a touch of genuine admiration. 'And I wish I were better worthy of such generous affection. But I never have been worthy of an honest man's love at the hour it was

offered to me. True love passed me by once, and might have been mine, but I let it go.'

She has risen from her seat by the window, and is walking slowly up and down the room, deeply thoughtful.

'Myra, make me happy. I only want your answer, your promise to be my wife, and then I'll go to Scotland or somewhere, and won't worry you with my society for the next six months, if you like.'

'And you would make me a peeress!' she exclaims, turning her kindling eyes upon him, her face, so wan before, lighted with excitement. 'You would place me above the women who have held themselves aloof from me, and looked at me in the Park as if my presence among them was an impertinence. You would give me a palace in London, and three or four country seats, and all the pageantry of fashionable life. You would set me abreast with the mightiest in the land. You would do all this for me—you, Lord Earlswood, to whom I have never been particularly civil!'

'There is nothing I possess in this world that I



value for its own sake half so much as for the power to give it to you,' said his lordship, deeply moved.

'There never was a woman so fit to be a peeress.'

'If a good fairy had offered me this gift years ago at Colehaven, when I was an ambitious girl, how gladly I should have accepted it! All good things come to me, but at the wrong time. Fate and the hour are never propitious.'

'Myra, your answer is yes, is it not?' demands Lord Earlswood anxiously.

'My answer is no,' she replies. 'I am grateful for your generous offer. It would suit my humour well to be a peeress, and trample upon the necks of a few women I know. I feel sometimes as if I had been born for place and power in the world. But there is something better. Yes, true love is better; and, unhappily, I do not love you.'

'I—I never expected that,' falters Lord Earlswood. 'I don't ask you to love me—not at first. I couldn't take such a liberty. But if you will only tolerate me, to begin with, you might come in time to find me not—utterly detestable; and eventually you might be rather fond of me. I should be so

proud of you. I should try so hard to make your life happy.'

'You are the most generous of men, and I should be—yes, I believe I should be positively happy as your wife, if—'

'If what, Myra?' he cries eagerly, as she hesitates. Hope dawns upon him again.

'If I had not a brighter dream, a fairer hope,' she answers with a far-away look.

'Dreams and hopes are, in a general way, rubbish,' he says. 'I offer you fifty thousand a year and a coronet. That's a tangible proposal.'

'I cannot forego my dream.'

'And, after I have been your slave for three years, you will send me away hopeless?' he remonstrates, with a dismal countenance. 'Remember, Myra, I shall be done for if you refuse me. It'll be a case of moral murder; for I shall take the quickest possible way of ruining myself—financially, if I can—constitutionally without doubt. I shall take to gambling and chloral. I daresay when next you hear of me it will be in the announcement of untimely deaths. Good-bye!'

‘Stay one moment, Lord Earlswood,’ cries Myra.

‘A century if you like.’

‘Shall I strike a bargain with you?’

‘Say you’ll be my wife in six months from to-day.’

‘No; I can’t do that. But if a year hence I am still a free woman, you may claim me.’

‘That means that you know you are going to marry some one else in the interim,’ says his lordship ruefully.

‘I know nothing. My future is veiled in obscurity. But if a year hence my hope is not realised, I shall know that it never will be, and I shall be free to marry you; and if I cannot give you my love, at the worst you shall have my gratitude and esteem.’

‘That is all I ask. But a year is such a long time.’

‘One London season, a little fishing and shooting, and the year is over.’

‘Well, I suppose I must be satisfied, but it’s rather hard upon a fellow.’

He pleads for some time longer, pleads and argues with as much eloquence as he can com-

mand; but Myra is firm as rock, and he ultimately departs, sorely disappointed, though not without hope.

‘You are going back to London immediately, I suppose?’ she says as he is leaving her.

‘Well—not quite; at least I’ve not made up my mind. Rather a nice hotel here—think I shall stay a day or two.’

Myra’s face clouds a little at this. Lord Earlswood sees the shadow, and is all the more bent upon remaining. That other fellow whom she loves must be here, thinks his lordship, and he may find out the mystery of her hopes and dreams, if he exercises his powers of observation.

‘I fancy you’ll be tired of Heldenburg in a couple of hours,’ says Myra.

‘Not if you’ll allow me to look in for an hour or so in the evening.’

Positive affliction expresses itself with painful distinctness in Mrs. Brandreth’s countenance.

‘O, if you have nothing better to do with yourself I suppose you must come,’ she says wearily, ‘but I warn you that I shall be dismal company.’

Last season's incessant work almost wore me out. I am but half alive, and came here to vegetate.'

'I'll come and vegetate with you for a little. I wouldn't much mind being one of two zoophites sticking side by side to a rock provided you were the other one,' replies his lordship; and with a languid shake hands they part.

Lord Earlswood has so sedulously trained his countenance to an expression of gentlemanlike vacuity that, though he loves to distraction, his features portray only indifference. He has but one look—a look which he would carry with him to the hymeneal altar, or the block.

## CHAPTER XII.

‘ From that day forth, in Peace and joyous Bliss  
They lived together long without debate ;  
Ne private Jarre, ne spite of Enemies,  
Could shake the safe assurance of their state.’

ONCE having looked into his wife's true eyes, once having held her to his troubled heart, there is no more possibility of doubt for Herman Westray. It was only while he kept himself resolutely aloof from her that he could think her changed ; that he could believe, as he has believed, that fair and perfect form a whited sepulchre, concealing inward pollution. Confidence, love, sympathy, all life's sweetest things have returned to Herman and Editha, and they discuss the future with honest friendly Dewrance, happy and hopeful once again, seated side by side, looking out at the opal sea, and the bathers in their many-coloured raiment, and the blue smiling sky, and feeling the universe in harmony with their own

hearts once again. And what of their troubles? That dreadful man in possession, for instance? That bill of sale, which means annihilation of their pretty home? These are but ciphers in the sum of life when that mighty total Love appears on the right side of the ledger.

It is settled in friendly counsel that Editha shall go back to England by this evening's boat, escorted by Mr. Dewrance. They will proceed straight to Roehampton, pick up nurse and baby, and then travel to Lochwithian, where Mrs. Westray is to remain safely lodged beneath the paternal roof-tree, while Herman gets through his difficulties, and sells off his furniture as advantageously as he can in liquidation of that luckless bill of sale.

'Do you know much of the man who holds it?' asks Dewrance.

'I don't know any good of him, except that he showed himself rather friendly in his dealings with me. He's a sixty per center in a general way: but he accommodated me on pretty reasonable terms, taking the bill of sale as his security. Of course I was a fool to go to him, but I thought I should right

myself in a month or two. It was only a temporary expedient.

‘One of those temporary expedients which mean permanent ruin,’ observes the sagacious Dewrance. ‘I shouldn’t wonder if Mr. Lyndhurst had a finger in this bill-of-sale business.’

Westray’s face darkens.

‘It was Lyndhurst who introduced me to the money-lender,’ he says.

‘Wheels within wheels. You may be thankful to have lost no more than your furniture.’

For sole reply Herman kisses his wife’s hand.

‘Herman, she says pleadingly, ‘if you could only make up your mind to come down to us when your troubles are over, and live at Lochwithian for a little while—with papa if you liked—or in a cottage of our own if you preferred it.’

‘In our own cottage, dearest ; we will have our own ingle-nook, were it ever so humble. Yes, dear, I will live in Wales. I will live wherever you can be happiest. I will turn my back on this hard bad world, and live in rustic tranquillity with you, and work honestly at my calling, and write for posterity.’



‘O, come now, don’t be too ambitious,’ expostulates Dewrance, ‘you must write books that will sell: books written for the future are rarely popular in the present. And they don’t always reach the future either. They’re like the drift people: we know precious little about them.’

Editha talks of that cottage on the slope of the hill at Lochwithian, and Herman is charmed with her description. He feels that it is in him to lead the Wordsworthian life, and think as Wordsworth thought, and achieve a new reputation. Perhaps every literary man has that yearning for a new reputation. Bulwer Lytton had it always, and was always winning a new crown unawares. Critics and public awarded the prize before they recognised the claimant. But it is given to very few men thus to succeed.

It is like a new courtship this happy hour of reconciliation, and Herman and his wife talk of the future as if they were planning their honeymoon. Between that blissful future and the immediate present there lies a gulf of parting, but Editha tries to ignore that dread abyss.

‘It will not take you very long to settle your affairs in London, will it, Herman?’ she asks.

‘Not long, dear. I shall make short work of my difficulties, I assure you.’

‘Why should I not stay at Roehampton till all is settled? It would be so much nicer to be near you.’

‘Much nicer for me, darling, but you will be better off at Lochwithian. I could not bear the idea of my wife being in a suburban lodging while her home was in process of destruction, hiding as it were from the eye of the world. The Priory is your proper place, dearest, at such a time, or I would not banish you. And you will be with Ruth, remember.’

‘Yes, that is a happiness. Dear Ruth! O Herman, I have sometimes thought lately that she is fading from us, that God will part me from my sister.’

‘My love, there are some people who bear the seal of eternal youth. Your sister is one who seems hardly meant to grow old in this world.’

The thought of that threatened loss saddens Editha in the midst of her happiness, and Dewrance is glad to break in upon the conversation with some

practical remark about Bradshaw and the Radnorshire trains.

It has been agreed between Mr. Westray and the Curate that Herman is to stay at Ostend and do his best to discover the sender of the telegram. Should he require farther aid from Dewrance, that faithful friend will return at his summons; but this seems unlikely. Editha knows why her husband is remaining, and approves; there is perfect confidence between them now.

The afternoon wears away—too fast for these reunited lovers. They go for a walk with Dewrance, who knows Ostend by heart, and shows them the old churches, and holds forth upon ecclesiastical architecture and Flemish art, while Herman and his wife stand side by side in the dusky aisle, thinking more of each other than of those angular Madonnas with high cheek-bones and closely-plaited auburn hair, florid Netherlandish complexions, and draperies whose glowing crimsons and vivid blues time has not faded, or sun bleached, or mildew tarnished.

A peaceful day—with a touch of sadness, for they are so soon to part, but with a deep sense of recovered

happiness—a day which hangs a little heavily for Dewrance, but for these two is so swift to pass away. Evening comes, and they are standing on the lamplit quay ; a few last loving words, a tender pressure of the hand, a clamorous bell ringing greedily, as if it grudged them the sweet sadness of parting, and they are divided. The boat dips and plunges. The lights of the town begin to bob up and down. Dewrance draws Editha's shawl round her as the autumn wind blows keenly across the sandy dunes, and Herman is left behind. Editha's eyes grow dim with tears.

‘How glad baby will be to see you!’ says that judicious Dewrance. ‘I suppose he has grown ever so much since I saw him last.’

Mrs. Westray brightens and begins to talk about baby, and, cheered by this conversation, descends by and by to the cabin, where she sleeps peacefully to the ocean lullaby ; the first peaceful slumber she has known since she left Roehampton at the bidding of that false summons.

## CHAPTER XIII.

‘ A lie will gain  
The goal, although from land to land,  
To get there, round the world it run,  
While Truth, half-waked, with drowsy hand  
Her travelling trim is buckling on.

All treachery could devise hath wrought  
Against us—letters robb’d and read,  
Snares hid in smiles, betrayal bought.’

TRANQUILLISED by reconciliation with his wife, Herman does what a wiser man might have done at the outset. He consults a local solicitor, and with that gentleman for his companion proceeds to the telegraph-office and endeavours to identify the sender of that lying message.

The telegraph clerks are at first disinclined to answer questions. It is against the rule that they should do so. It is impossible that they should remember the senders of telegrams or the circumstances, whether ordinary or extraordinary, attending the sending thereof.

‘But if your system is used for a mischievous purpose, as it easily may be, don’t you think it is your duty to give all the help you can in unearthing the offender?’ asks Herman hotly.

The telegraphists have not considered the question in that light. They are of opinion that their duty lies chiefly in minding their own business, and holding themselves rigidly within the narrow lines of routine.

The Belgian lawyer lays his hand upon Herman’s sleeve soothingly.

‘Permit me, monsieur,’ he says; and then with infinite courtesy presents the question to the officials: ‘A false message, purporting to come from this gentleman, has been sent to this gentleman’s wife, summoning her to Ostend—to his death-bed. Figure to yourself, then, the alarm of madame. Must one permit such a baseness? But it is an abuse of the system of telegraphy.’

The officials know the man of law, and to a fellow-townsmen are more communicative than to Herman. They exercise their memories, look back at their books, whisper together a little, and finally show

themselves willing to afford any information in their power. There is the message, in the words Editha has repeated to her husband, but nobody in the office can remember anything about the sender of that particular telegram.

‘It might be that it was Alphonse who took the message,’ says one, when Herman is on the point of leaving the office in despair.

Alphonse is juvenile and an underling. The second official hardly thinks it likely that it was Alphonse. While the two clerks discuss this question the swinging door opens and Alphonse enters, flushed and oleaginous from the café where he has breakfasted at 1 franc 25 centimes, wine included.

‘But here is the young man of which it acts. Say then, Alphonse;’ and both clerks assail him at once with eager questioning.

Alphonse blushes, wipes his moustache still bedewed with the last drops of Macon, and confesses to remembering the sending of a message to England, to some place near London, on the date Herman has mentioned.

‘I remember, because it was sent by two persons, a lady and a gentleman,’ he says; ‘and they have talked much before sending it, and they have disputed between themselves as to the words, and the lady she was pale like the death.’

‘A lady!’ exclaims Herman, puzzled. ‘What need of a woman’s handiwork in this black business?’ he asks himself.

‘Yes, a lady, young and handsome, or at least not an all-young girl—*une dame posée*. She held herself all quietly,’ continues Alphonse, interested in his subject, ‘and she had the air to give her orders to this monsieur, but she was not the less agitated. Her inferior lip trembled a little. I have remarked it.’

‘Describe her,’ cries Herman. ‘The man I know: tall, stout, dark, pale, with black whiskers.’

‘But precisely. It is he.’

‘Describe this woman.’

Alphonse bursts into pantomime.

‘Permit, monsieur, it is not so easy to describe a handsome woman. That does not describe itself. Madame has the eyes of a beautiful brown—*une*



chevelure, mais une si belle chevelure, châtain clair. She is tall, svelte. She is gloved to ravish. Her toilette is of an exquisite simplicity. She has the vivacity, the fashions of an artist,' Alphonse thinks.

Warmed with le petit vin rouge which has accompanied his breakfast of bullock's kidney *aux champignons*, Alphonse is enthusiastic and diffuse. The English lady has evidently made an impression upon the susceptible heart of this telegraphic youth.

Herman's brow darkens ominously as he hears and meditates on what he has heard. There is one woman whom Alphonse's description fits to a nicety; but no, he cannot think that she—Colonel Clitheroe's daughter, the woman he played with as a child—could soil her honour thus—could sink to such a nethermost depth of infamy. And after all it is difficult to fix an image with mere words. Alphonse's glowing description might depicture twenty women. Lyndhurst's feminine acquaintance were doubtless numerous. Strange though that any woman, however fallen, should lend herself to this foul scheme. Strange that a woman's aid should be needed in so

simple a matter as the sending of the telegram. Would not the fact of this woman's presence imply that she was rather the instigator than the abettor of Lyndhurst's treachery?

'But I recall myself,' exclaims Alphonse suddenly, while Herman is darkly considering possibilities; 'if monsieur would well be certified there is a means.'

'What means?' cries Herman.

'Madame has let fall her pocket-handkerchief at the moment of leaving the bureau. I have picked it up, and kept it, believing that she would return to seek it. It carries her monogram at the corner. It is at the service of monsieur if he wishes it.'

'I'll give you a sovereign for it,' exclaims Herman.

'But, monsieur,' pleads Alphonse, with a cunning twinkle in his small black eyes, 'the lace with which it is bordered is of a value.'

'Two sovereigns!' says Herman.

Alphonse opens his desk and hands a filmy cambric handkerchief, Valenciennes bordered, across the counter to Herman.

‘ Since madame will evidently not return to claim it,’ he murmurs self-excusingly.

Herman looks for the monogram.

The gothic letters M. V. B., surrounded with a wreath of forget-me-nots in finest satin-stitch, adorn one corner.

‘ Myra Vansittart Brandreth.’ There are not many people who know Mrs. Brandreth’s second name, but Herman is one of the few. It is her mother’s maiden name. In her girlish days she was rather proud of signing herself in full, Myra Vansittart Clitheroe, with a flourish under the C.

Alphonse receives his two sovereigns, and is glad. However sweet it may have been to him to retain that perfumed souvenir of a charming woman, fifty francs are sweeter. How many breakfasts, how many dinners, cigarettes, games at billiards, are comprehended in such a sum !

Mr. Westray informs his legal adviser that he is quite satisfied now. He has traced the sender of the telegram. There is no shadow of doubt in his mind.

‘It is an ugly thing for a woman to have done,’ says the lawyer, with a shrug.

Herman remembers a certain Sunday evening in Bloomsbury-square, and a famous couplet of Congreve’s :

‘Heaven has no rage like love to hatred turn’d,  
And hell no fury like a woman scorn’d.’

## CHAPTER XIV.

‘O crueller than was ever told in tale  
Or sung in song! O vainly lavish’d love!  
O cruel! There was nothing wild or strange,  
Or seeming shameful—for what shame in love,  
So love be true, and not as yours is?—nothing  
Poor Vivien had not done to win his trust,  
Who call’d her what he call’d her—all her crime,  
All, all, the wish to prove him wholly hers.’

‘Left her in her tears, and dried not one of them with his comfort.’

‘CURIOUS to have refused a coronet,’ muses Mrs. Brandreth, letting Cadol’s latest novel, in a pink cover, fall open in her lap. Her mind is too full to find room for the shadows of fiction, be they never so life-like, or psychologically true to the worst side of human nature. She reads page after page mechanically, with the eyes only, and finally abandons the book altogether. ‘Who would believe it of me,’ she asks herself; ‘of me, who seem such a worldling? And it would have been something to be called Lady Earlswood, and to have prime ministers and

foreign plenipotentiaries at my dinner-parties, and to have set the fashion, and had carriages and new geraniums and hats called after me ; something to have changed all at once from a player-queen into a real potentate ; something won to have no more thought for the future, no need to save money, and bethink myself that age and gray hairs must come ; something to know that I should wear purple till it served for my pall. Yet I can surrender this gladly, proudly, for the sweeter gain I have played for so boldly.'

She recalls those Sunday evenings that Herman and she have spent, almost *en tête-à-tête*, in that exclusive little drawing-room of hers ; the amber curtains drooping between them and the outer world. She thinks of hours in which it has seemed to her that the old love has come back, the old days have been renewed, youth and hope born again, life's afternoon flushed and brightened with the morning's rose-colour.

'I suit him best,' she thinks. 'I can share in his work ; I can help his ambition. Nature and art have made us for each other, he and I, while

that poor petty fool has not a thought in common with him.'

Yes, for this hope—for the hope of seeing Herman at her feet—she willingly foregoes wealth and status; willingly as she has sacrificed honour, honesty, womanly feeling for the same end. And it must be said in her favour that of the two this latter sacrifice costs her least.

She has seen no English newspaper since her arrival at Heldenburg, just a week ago, and she does not know that Hamilton Lyndhurst has journeyed to a country not included in modern atlases, or described by the useful Murray, and to which the indefatigable Cook 'personally conducts' no excursionists.

Lord Earlswood comes in and out two or three times in a day, and she tolerates his presence with a little more than her usual civility, feeling grateful for that offer of his. It is something to fall back upon at the worst—a *pis-aller*. If love fail her, despite her desperate endeavour to lure him back to her net, Plutus will yet be propitious. She will not have lived in vain.

'I will console myself by spending more money

than any peeress in London, and in shutting my doors against some of the best people in Burke. My rooms shall be more exclusive than Almack's in the famous Jersey and Londonderry days, and I will refuse to receive duchesses if they are not the fashion.'

'But love is best—love is best of all,' she thinks, after a brief indulgence in that splendid vision. 'What good can I have more out of society than I have had, upon a small scale? It will be only widening the area. Love is best. O, for the old Devonshire lanes, and the blue sea shining at us across a break in the woods! O, for long summer afternoons far away from this idle world, with the man I love!'

She thinks of the day when he held her hand in his among the foxgloves and the fern, and told her that she was all the world to him. They have travelled their diverse roads in life since then. Could they but come back to that old trysting-place, and have faith in each other as of old, and begin the world again—yes, that would be verily the dawn of a new life.



Whereupon, as she is dreaming of such a return, with eyes fixed on the western glow yonder above the sea line, enters Lord Earlswood, carrying his hat and cane as if they were the two parts of a musical instrument, from which he was prepared to extract melody. He unships his cane, ships it again under his left arm, and takes Mrs. Brandreth's hand, which he clings to with a limp affectionateness for some moments.

‘So good of you to let me drop in like this,’ he says.

If Myra aspired to candour, she would reply that she suffers the infliction because she cannot help herself. But she inwardly resolves to leave Heldenburg speedily. In Kensington Gore Lord Earlswood is one of many, and his society so much the less a burden.

‘Why don’t you come out on the digue?’ he asks. ‘It’s very nice. Lots of people.’

‘If there were no people, I’d come; but I hate being stared at. And I daresay somebody would contrive to identify me, thanks to the photographers.’

‘Sure to,’ replies his lordship. ‘They’ve got it in the papers already.’

‘What?’

‘Your name. There’s a horrid little local paper—flabby, and smelling of printer’s ink. They fasten it on to a stick in the cafés to keep it from dropping to pieces, it’s such a flaccid invertebrate creature.’

‘Well?’

‘There’s a paragraph about you. I bought a paper on purpose to show you.’ His lordship produces the limp journal and reads: “‘We have been pleased to observe the charming English actress, Miss Brandworth”—call you Miss and got your name wrong—“has taken an apartment in one of the new houses on the esplanade. Another proof that Heldenburg is advancing in popularity. These insulars have heard of us in their barbaric climate, where we are assured there is but one fashionable watering-place—Brighton in the New Forest. For invalids they have, it is true, their Isle of Wights, with its pretty town of Scarborough, and its adjacent islets of Dogs and Mans.”’

Mrs. Brandreth laughs faintly, and seems not over-pleased that the local print should have made known her presence.

‘O, by the bye,’ exclaims Lord Earlswood, after a longish silence, during which he has performed dumbly with his cane on the crown of his hat, with as intent a countenance as if he were carefully executing one of Chopin’s most elaborate compositions in seven flats, relieved by occasional double sharps, ‘I’ve got some news for you.’

His lordship’s idea of a brilliant conversationalist is that he should be the first to communicate some startling event, calamitous or otherwise, no matter how uninteresting to the recipient—a fire in Blackfriars or Ratcliff Highway, a glazier fallen through a skylight, the failure of a bank, or a play, or a picture. If the event, on the other hand, has any point of special interest to the listener, the conversationalist scores double.

Myra has been watching the evening sky dreamily, not quite awakened from that dream in which Lord Earlswood surprised her. She turns to him languidly.

‘You are a great purveyor of marvels,’ she remarks. ‘What is the last startling event? Not Westminster Abbey burnt down, I hope, or the Emperor of Russia assassinated?’

‘No. It’s something stranger than that—about somebody you know,’ replies Lord Earlswood, with unction.

Myra’s attention is keen enough now. Her small world—that inner world, that universe in little which each of us carries in his breast—holds but one person. Her first thought is of him.

‘Who is it?’ she asks impatiently. ‘I know so many people.’

‘Yes, but this is a particular friend—used to meet him always at your Sunday evenings.’

‘Can’t you say whom you are talking about?’ exclaims Myra, her breath coming quicker.

‘Hamilton Lyndhurst. Clever fellow, but not quite—in short, you know, a bad egg—a very speckly potato.’

Myra grows suddenly pale, and looks at Lord Earlswood strangely—with a look of absolute fear, he thinks. He suspects all at once that Lyndhurst

has been his rival, and not Westray; and a faint light kindles in his dull gray eyes.

‘What of Mr. Lyndhurst?’ asks Myra breathlessly.

‘O, nothing out of the common, poor fellow. Dead!’

This is more awful than anything she could have feared. Dead! The keystone of the arch gone—all the fabric fallen into ruin, perhaps.

Her head sinks back upon the cushion of her chair; her dry lips move dumbly. She looks as if she were going to faint.

‘I didn’t know the news would be such a floorer,’ says Lord Earlswood drily, with a suppressed savagery. ‘If I had known, I should have been more careful how I told you. I would have gone to that white-washed convent outside the town and got one of the sisters to break it to you.’

‘Don’t be idiotic!’ exclaims Myra contemptuously. ‘Mr. Lyndhurst was no more to me than the next stranger who passes by on the pavement below. But it is awful to hear of such a sudden

death—a man I saw last strong, vigorous, full of plans for the future.’

She recalls that conversation in her dressing-room at the Frivolity, and Hamilton Lyndhurst’s excuse for his evil life. Death was always at his shoulder.

‘Yes,’ says Lord Earlswood, ‘it’s very horrid that a man can be taken off like that. Makes long invitations for dinner-parties and speculative bets on next year’s races quite a mockery, doesn’t it? You may stand to win a pot of money on the Guineas or the Cup, and the beggar who gave you the odds goes off the hooks like this. Lyndhurst is in my book for ever so many events.’

‘How did he die?’ asks Myra, who has not heard a word of this lament.

She has a horrible idea that Herman and Lyndhurst may have met, and that Lyndhurst’s death may have been the issue of their meeting. She sees herself for an instant—with all the vividness of an overpowering apprehension—the instigator and cause of a murder.

‘Heart-disease,’ drawls his lordship. ‘There

has been a good deal of talk about it at Ostend. I ran over there this morning, and heard the news at the public rooms. Westray and his wife were with him when he died, it seems, at an hotel in Ostend. Horrid to die at a strange hotel, with none of one's traps about one. He hadn't even a servant, it seems. Dreadfully benighted state.'

Myra lapses into silence—deepest gloom depicted in her brooding face.

'You must have been awfully friendly with him to feel his death so much,' says Lord Earlswood, moodily jealous.

'Don't I tell you that his death is nothing to me? One man less in the world, that is all. Did you hear anything more? Did people say anything about the circumstances attending his death?'

'Nothing particular. It was very sudden—dropped down senseless, and never spoke again. Doctors called it heart-disease. There was a post-mortem, you know; everything *en règle*.'

'There was no scandal—no insinuation against Mrs. Westray's character? No question as to how she came to be with him?'

‘Of course not. There was her husband with her, you see ; and a husband is supposed to be a kind of protector. I don’t mean to say that he always is, you know ; but society accepts him in that light.’

‘When did this happen?’

‘Nearly a week ago. Poor Lyndhurst was to be buried this afternoon. Very quiet funeral—all over by this time. Melancholy consequence of one’s death, isn’t it? I wouldn’t so much mind dying if it wasn’t for the burying process. If I could be allowed to lie about somewhere out of people’s way, or be deodorised like sewage, and turned to some use agriculturally, or stuck at the top of a high tower and pecked at by birds till there was nothing left of me but nice clean bones. There’s nothing objectionable in bones, you know. Yes, they’ve buried poor Lyndhurst in a horrid foreign cemetery, where people stick twopenny gilt vases on the graves, and paper flowers.’

‘Hark ! what is that?’ cries Myra, starting up.

A shrill peal of the bell belonging to this first-floor. A visitor for Mrs. Brandreth.

‘I don’t know a soul here except you,’ she says,



more discomposed by the interruption than she need be, Lord Earlswood thinks, always inclined to suspicion.

Her maid is heard in converse with some one in the little ante-room. These new houses are mere lath and plaster, and one hears so well. A man's voice. Great Heaven, whose? Her heart beats as if it would burst.

Yes, it is the voice she knows so well. The door opens, and Herman enters, pale in the twilight, and with an inflexible look in brow and eyes and lips.

'Good heavens, Herman, what is the matter?' she cries, calling him by the dear familiar name which she has spoken so often when they were children.

'Not very much,' he answers quietly. 'A mere trifle, in fact. I have come all the way from Ostend to bring you this.'

He takes the lace-bordered handkerchief from his breast-pocket and hands it to her.

'You still use your favourite wood-violet, I find,' he says, as he gives her the perfumed cambric.

She looks at him with a stony stare—half bewilderment, half alarm. Has he gone out of his mind? Has some horror connected with Lyndhurst's death driven him mad? This is a deeper ruin than she dreamed of.

‘Herman!’

‘You are surprised,’ he says. ‘You don’t remember, perhaps, where you dropped that handkerchief?’

‘No,’ she answers mechanically, still looking at him with the same blank terror in her face.

‘I wonder that so clever a woman as you, engaged in such an ugly business, should have left any trace of your presence. That handkerchief was found in the telegraph office at Ostend a week ago.’

‘Indeed! Yes, I had to send a telegram to my acting manager,’ replies Myra, with composure. She knows now why he is here, and that all is discovered. The utmost she can attempt is denial.

‘You were not telegraphing to him when you dropped that handkerchief,’ says Herman. ‘You were assisting—or perhaps I should say instigating—Mr. Lyndhurst to send a lying telegram to my

wife ; a telegram affecting to come from me, her husband, stricken down by sudden illness, summoning her to my sick-bed. She was to come and find Mr. Lyndhurst there to meet her. A pretty scheme, was it not—one woman trying to compass the destruction of another—a womanly revenge upon an unconscious rival ?

‘ You forget that we are not alone ! ’ cries Myra.

‘ I do not. I believe Lord Earlswood to be as much interested in knowing your part in this business as I am.’

‘ Thank you,’ says his lordship, who stands holding on to the back of a chair, very pale, and with his eyes on Myra’s face. ‘ Thank you, Westray. That’s friendly, at any rate.’

‘ I don’t know how you came by this notion,’ says Myra. ‘ I have not seen Mr. Lyndhurst since I left London.’

‘ Don’t trouble yourself to tell lies on my account,’ interposes Lord Earlswood. ‘ I can see the truth in your face.’

‘ On your account ! ’ cries Myra, with biting scorn. ‘ Do you think I am trying to justify

myself in your eyes? Herman, will you listen to me?’

‘Only when you tell me the black and bitter truth. What could have induced you to mix yourself in this abominable scheme—you, my seeming friend?’

‘Friend—yes, your friend,’ Myra murmurs with white lips.

‘What can have transformed you—you whom I remember ten years ago candid and fresh and innocent? You, the daughter of a gentleman and a soldier. What can have tempted you to become—the name is too vile; I cannot utter it.’

‘What has transformed me!’ echoes Myra, confronting him desperately, all thought of escape abandoned, despair and passion overwhelming every instinct of self-preservation. ‘What! Do you pretend not to know; you who tempted me; you who have seemed so happy at my side—at my feet almost—all through the summer that is gone? You ask me that—you who have left your wife to solitude, or baby-worship, and given me the first-fruits of your wit and wisdom, all your golden leisure; you who

have made your art a pretext to be happy with me ; you who have suffered me to think that the old love has come back to life ? And now you dare to ask me what tempted me ! You, and you only ; my love for you, which is stronger than myself ; my hope of loosening the bond between you and your foolish wife. Yes, I avow it ; I am that vile thing your lips refuse to name. I egged on Lyndhurst in his pursuit of your wife ; I suggested the telegram which was to bring her to Ostend and blast her reputation, and give you ground for a divorce. If my scheme had prospered, you would have been a free man, and would have come back to me. A nine days' wonder, a newspaper report, and you and I would have been free to begin a new life, all the world before us—fame, and hope, and the old love made young again.'

'Do you think I should have come back to you ?' asks Herman, with deliberate contempt. 'Do you think—even if I had been caught in your trap, and had believed my wife what you would have had me believe her—do you think I should have brought my wounded heart to you for comfort—to you, who live

before the lights, and are falser off the stage than on it; to you, who believe in no God, fear no devil? No, Mrs. Brandreth; you are a charming companion for a dull Sunday afternoon, an admirable hostess, an artist of the highest flight, but to share a man's hopes, to lift his soul above this sordid earth, is not your *métier*. I did not believe that it was in you to grovel in a moral gutter, even for the indulgence of a cherished caprice, which you honour yourself and me too much by calling love. I am sorry that Colonel Clitheroe's daughter should have fallen so low. For the rest, I am happy to tell you that my wife and I were never more united than we are at this moment, and that the prospect of our married life never seemed brighter to us than it seems to-day.'

She tries to answer him, facing him defiantly, erect, drawn to her fullest height, like a martyr at the stake; but the pale lips move tremulously and make no sound. Her throat is parched; words will not come at her bidding. Her brain clouds; she feels as if this were the first warning of some awful seizure.

Herman turns on his heel and leaves the room without another word. Lord Earlswood, brushing his hat assiduously with his pale-gray glove, slowly follows.

‘What!’ she says, with a laugh, such a curious laugh, ‘are you going too? You know all now; you know how foolish I have been, and who was your only rival. But I am cured now; I have had my lesson.’

It flashes upon her bewildered brain that after all there is one resource still left her. Love is a sealed book evermore, a sepulchre that holds only the ashes of dead hopes; but ambition remains. She may be a peeress—the fashion. She may have place and power, and diamonds and palaces, and all those good things for which other women are ready to sell their souls. She has ventured hers on a more foolish game, and, lo, her reward! This poor Earlswood will have been disconcerted, no doubt, by Herman’s disclosures—cruel, heartless, iniquitous, from lips she has worshipped. But he is so soft and slavish a creature, and so blindly adores her, she does not fear the issue.

He turns at her voice, and pauses on the threshold, but does not come back to her—not by so much as a step. She wonders to see him stand there immovable, looking down with an embarrassed air, and still engaged in smoothing that hat of his—the most perfect thing in hats ; with the very curve affected by princes.

‘ You say you have had your lesson,’ he says slowly. ‘ I don’t think you can need any commentary upon it from me. I am rather an easy-going kind of fellow in a general way—not shocked at a trifle. I don’t expect women to be perfect, or the essence of truth even. But there *is* a line ; you’ve overstepped it. Good-evening.’

He is gone, and she knows that it is for ever. Love and ambition have gone out of the door together, and left her lonely.



## CHAPTER XV.

“ Who calleth thee, Heart? World’s Strife,  
With a golden heft to his knife;  
World’s Mirth, with a finger fine  
That draws on a board in wine  
Her blood-red plans of life;  
World’s Gain, with a brow knit down;  
World’s Fame, with a laurel crown  
Which rustles most as the leaves turn brown:  
Heart, wilt thou go?”  
“ No, no!  
Calm hearts are wiser so.”

HERMAN goes back to London and faces his difficulties boldly. His creditors—tailor, bootmaker, bookseller, frame-maker, corn-chandler, wine-merchant, and the rest of them—would be easy enough to deal with, but the bill of sale is in the grip of a relentless usurer, and there is nothing but to make a clean sweep of things, and see the pretty rooms at Fulham pulled to pieces: the Pompeian dining-room, the Dutch drawing-room brought piecemeal to

the hammer ; the graceful draperies folded into unsightly bundles ; the Sèvres and majolica and terracotta and bronze, the old Moscow china and modern Minton all jumbled together upon a kitchen table and disfigured with lot numbers ; to see grimy brokers banded together in their villanous ‘ knock-out,’ and to know that his goods stand in danger of being disposed of for less than their value. All this Herman endures, and attends the sale bravely in order to secure sundry trifles which he knows Editha especially cherishes. He contrives, with friendly help from his publisher, to rescue the Squire’s wedding-gift, that old silver which has been in the Morcombe family for a century and a half.

Everybody is very good to him. It seems to him that the world is not such a bad world after all, even for a man under a cloud, albeit he has so heartily abused it in occasional fits of spleen. All his old friends rally round him ; and for the new ones, those who have come to his house out of curiosity, and affected his society because he was the fashion ?—well, he can afford to lose the few flimsy acquaintance who fall away in the hour of

need. It is but a winnowing of the chaff from the corn. He remembers what Coleridge says of such—

‘ If a foe have kenn’d,  
Or worse than foe, an alienated friend,  
A rib of dry rot in thy ship’s stout side,  
Think it God’s message, and in humble pride  
With heart of oak replace it; thine the gains—  
Give him the rotten timber for his pains.’

He takes a couple of rooms in Bloomsbury, where he can work for a few quiet hours every night while he is engaged during the day in the adjustment of his affairs. He examines his stock-in-trade and finds himself not badly off. There is that comedy planned for the most part in Mrs. Brandreth’s drawing-room, two acts of which are completed and set up in type. He has also a novel half finished. He determines to finish the play before he leaves London, and if possible to plant it advantageously. There will hardly be any difficulty about this; for his name is allied with the success of the Frivolity Theatre, and he will be gladly welcomed at any comedy house in London.

For his novel, how sweet to finish it in the rustic quiet of Lochwithian, to read his story aloud to

Editha, chapter by chapter, to subordinate his style to her refining taste, to think and dream over his work before he gives it to the world as he has been unable to think or dream in the fever of metropolitan life, amidst the distractions of clubs and dinner-parties ! He writes to his wife almost every day, if only a few lines, and his letters, however brief, are full of love and gladness. He writes like a lover for whom wedded life is yet to begin.

Editha's letters, save upon the subject of Ruth's failing health, declining day by day, are cheering. The Squire has taken the tidings of his son-in-law's ruin more patiently than his daughter could have hoped, and has expressed no surprise at the fact.

'I expected it all along,' he has said, after a few feeble groans. 'What else can one look for from a man who writes books? You can't suppose that such a man will be practical or business-like, or keep an eye upon pounds, shillings, and pence. His ideas are all up in the skies. I wonder such men walk straight, and don't get run over. No, I am not surprised, Editha. I'm sorry for you, of course, but you must have expected as much when you mar-

ried him. And poor Hetheridge ready to make you mistress of as fine an estate as you could see in a day's ride. A practical man too; not a better farmer in all Brecknockshire.'

The Squire, having moaned his moan, is kind, but does not offer substantial aid, finding the daily calls upon his income quite as much as he can satisfy. There is a home for Herman and his wife at the Priory, he tells Editha, as long as they like to stay there; but Editha knows that dependence of this kind would not suit her husband's temper, and her thoughts are of the cottage yonder on the slope of the hill.

She and Ruth have long and confidential talks about the future of this prodigal couple in those happier days when Ruth is at her best, and fear gives way to hope for a little while. Dr. Davis, good-natured little man, has pronounced no sentence of doom. He comes and goes in his quiet way, and is attentive and watchful, and enjoins especial care of the invalid as the autumn days grow shorter and colder; but he tells no one that which he knows too well: that all that is earthly in Ruth Morecombe is

fading fast, like summer's last roses by the fountain yonder ; that while the spirit brightens day by day its mortal tabernacle as surely decays. He leaves them as long as he can the respite of uncertainty.

‘If we could only set up housekeeping again in that picturesque cottage!’ sighs Editha, sitting in her favourite attitude by Ruth’s pillow, Herman’s last letter in her lap.

‘And why not, darling?’ asks Ruth, with her glorified smile.

‘Well, dear, there is the question of furniture ; however simple, you know, it must cost money. There are such innumerable items—mattresses and coal-scuttles and saucepans and door-mats—that hardly come into one’s idea of a house ; but they must be had all the same. One couldn’t get on for a day without a flour-dredger, and one’s whole system of housekeeping would break down if one forgot to buy a cruet-stand. I always envy our cottagers, beginning with a bedstead and bedding, a few chairs and a table, half a dozen cups and saucers and plates bought of a travelling hawker, and just enough hard-

ware to cook a dinner of bacon and cabbage. But if we were ever so poor, Herman would expect his dinner-table to be just as well arranged as at his club. He would be content with claret at eighteen-pence a bottle, but he would not drink it out of a clumsy glass. However, we must rub on in furnished lodgings for a year or so, not far from here, dearest—at Llandrysak, perhaps—till Herman has earned enough to furnish a new home. I will take care there shall be no extravagance this time, no long bill from a fashionable upholsterer to burst upon us like a bomb-shell some morning.’

‘Darling, why should you wait?’ asks Ruth, in that sweet serious voice of hers—so low yet so clear—so gently persuasive. ‘I know your heart is longing for that house on the hillside, and for the pleasure of furnishing a new home after your own simple taste. Why should it not be done at once? All that I have is yours: it is only a question of now or later.’

‘Ruth!’ exclaims Editha, with a piteous little cry.

‘Dearest, we know what must be soon, though

we do not speak of it. We are in the hands of the All-Wise. It is not loss or sorrow coming upon us, only a brief parting. My pet, why do you cry like that, when you see how happy I am, knowing that you are beloved, that all that was amiss in your life is set right? Let us talk of your new house, dear. It must be got ready at once. I have five hundred pounds in the bank that will just do to buy furniture. You shall go to Shrewsbury with papa and choose the things. Indeed, love, I have no use for the money; it is only lying idle. I gave papa a new steam-plough on his last birthday, and made him happy. I shall have my dividends again before his next birthday, if God spares me so long, and can give him something more for his farm.'

'Ruth, you are too good, too generous. I accept your gift gratefully, gladly: there never could be any sense of obligation between you and me.'

It is all settled. Next morning's post brings Editha a long letter from Herman, telling her that the sale is over; that their goods and chattels realised a fair price on the whole, despite the knockers-out.



‘A few good fellows of my acquaintance ventilated the things at the clubs, dear,’ writes Herman cheerily—‘said I was going to live in Wales, on your estate, and that if people wanted to see æsthetic chairs and tables they had better have a look at my villa. So a lot of notoriety-mongers came down and bought coffee-tables and bronzes and teacups that had belonged to the popular dramatist. One poor old lady in dyed hair fought hard for your work-table, but I would have sacrificed a year’s income on the spot rather than let it go. You will be pleased to hear that I have secured most of your favourite objects : the little Copenhagen *déjeuner* you used for afternoon tea, your easy-chair, your pet-chromos, the bronze Psyche you used to admire, and various trifles for which you had an affection. The Squire’s wedding-gift—Paul Lemery’s silver—is snugly reposing at the Union Bank. So ruin has spared us a few odd spars from the wreck.’

This letter gladdens Editha’s heart ; for it assures her that his home has been dear to Herman, and that its relics are sacred. She writes him an answer full of gratitude. It is more than kind of

him to have remembered her likings and fancies in the midst of his troubles. She is quite hopeful about the future, she tells him, but says not a word of Ruth's generosity or of a new home. She winds up by asking him how soon he will be able to come down to the Priory, but adds, with gentle self-abnegation, that he must take his own time in settling his affairs and finishing the play he has told her about, and not wear himself out by too rapid work.

The truth underlying this wifely injunction is that Editha—fondly as she longs for the hour of reunion—has business of importance to get through before that hour comes. She and Ruth talk over their plans together like a pair of conspirators, and are as earnest and mysterious as if they were hatching treason.

Herman toils on with indomitable energy. He finishes his play—a comedy of the Sardou school, with a vein of strong domestic interest—finishes it to his own satisfaction. In these desperate crises of life a man seems to work with more than his normal strength, there is a force and fire engendered of stern necessity. He offers the piece to a West-end manager,

and his offer is received with rapture. The leading actress is enchanted at the idea of playing a part intended for Mrs. Brandreth. Herman has confessed frankly that the piece was planned for the Frivolity, but that he has changed his mind about it.

‘Some disagreement about terms, I suppose,’ suggests the manager.

‘No; I have had no reason to complain of Mrs. Brandreth’s liberality,’ answers Herman, ‘and I shall be quite satisfied if you give me the same terms. But I thought, as the piece progressed, that the character was—well, hardly suited to her. However, you had better read the piece, and see if you would like to produce it.’

‘A work of supererogation,’ says the manager. ‘I feel convinced it will do. If it is as good as *Kismet*—’

‘I venture to hope and believe that it is better than *Kismet*.’

The manager reads, and is delighted. Recklessness and dash are the prevailing characteristics of the play, but there is no offence in it. It paints the last follies of modern society; it strikes to the heart

of domestic life, and shows the pathetic side of characters which on the surface are broadly comic.

So one dull morning early in November the company of that famous comedy house, the Pall-Mall, assemble to hear Herman read his play. He is perhaps a shade more nervous than he was last time at the Frivolity, or the time before last; for that strong rock, his self-esteem, has been shaken, though not overthrown. It trembles on its basis like the famous Logan rock, on the wild Cornish shore, but the basis is sound enough, all the same. Herman feels that success is more vital to him just now than it has ever been. He is beginning a new career. He has fortune to win—a new name to create. He has worked hard and honestly at this last play, with a dogged determination to do his uttermost. He has a feeling that it must be a startling success or a stupendous failure. There will be no *succès d'estime* this time. And though he thinks of Myra Brandreth the woman with a shudder of utter loathing, he thinks of Mrs. Brandreth the actress with a touch of regret. There is no one like her. She has a finesse, a power of seizing the author's meaning and making

the utmost of it, a power of imparting force and depth to the author's language, which startle him—the creator and originator—like a revelation, until he asks himself wonderingly: ‘Did I ever intend this? Did I see what a great effect I was leading up to here?’

As compared with all other acting Myra's seems inspiration. Miss Delavigne, the leading actress at the Pall-Mall, has vigour and dramatic instinct; a pleasing face; a fine contralto voice, full and round and sweet; dark eyes with a sunny smile in them—and there are so few eyes that smile—but she has not Myra's electric intensity, those looks that seem to burn, those thrilling tones that move her audience to sudden tears before they have time to be ashamed of their weakness.

Herman glances furtively at the circle of strange faces before he begins to read. A grave interest is the predominating expression; but in one or two there is a sour look, a shade of discontent in advance, as much as to say, ‘I know *my* part will be worth nothing.’

He reads—reads as he used to read to Editha in

the first year of their married life—reads well too, though he is nervous at starting. Miss Delavigne listens intently; Mr. M'Allister, the light comedian, grins approvingly now and then; Mr. Vickery, the old man, mutters an occasional 'Good again,' in his quaint voice. The points all tell. Yes, Herman feels that, so far at least, his piece is safe. Never has he been so anxious. He wipes his damp forehead when the last act is finished, and feels as if he were the veriest tyro, and had been reading his first attempt.

This business settled, he is free to go down to Lochwithian, and he loses not an hour before starting.

The horror of those three days at Ostend has taught him how much he loves his wife, how needful her love and truth are to his peace—better than their two years of tranquil wedded happiness. He has believed her lost to him, and has measured her worth by the blankness of his life without her.

Happy November day which sees him pacing the picturesque old streets of Shrewsbury, during the hour's delay unavoidable at the break in his journey.

Happy day, light and bright and pleasant, though a drizzling rain falls fast all the while, and Shrewsbury's flagstones are sloppy. He treads as lightly, and feels as airy and irresponsible a creature, as a schoolboy going home for the holidays. He does not even envy the Shrewsbury boys, once famous for winning big prizes at the universities, as they come whooping out of the grave old gothic school. He envies nobody to-day. He is hastening to Editha; he is able to tell her that his new comedy is to be played six weeks hence at the Pall-Mall; that his debts are paid; that he is to have a thousand pounds down on the nail for his new novel, and a half share in all profits accruing from the sale of all editions thereof after the first six months. He will stay at the Priory for two or three weeks while he and Editha are deliberating as to where they shall pitch their tent, temporarily, in a furnished house or in lodgings. But to take up his abode in another man's house—even his father-in-law's—for any length of time is not to be thought of. He has made up his mind, virtuously, to live wherever Editha likes in future. All places are within easy reach of London

nowadays. It is only a question of an hour or two more or less in a railway carriage. To live in the Lake district in Southey's time, when a journey to London and back meant a week in a stifling incommodious stage-coach, must have been absolute exile from the metropolis; and yet these poets seem to have dwelt among the lakes and mountains for sheer pleasure. And why should not he, for Editha's dear sake, reconcile himself to a perpetual prospect of hills and woods, blue sky and rose-garden? The streets would seem so much the more delightful when he did go to London. And again, of distinction in living thus remote, a being apart from the vulgar throng. Tennyson in the Isle of Wight, Hugo at Guernsey, Madame Sand at Nohant: yes, great intellects are fond of solitude. To be dependent upon a literary club for one's ideas, to find one's inspiration in Hyde Park, is to acknowledge one's self a poor creature.

The train stops at the Llandrysak station. No one to watch its arrival to-day. Llandrysak looks like a settlement that has gone to sleep; the hotels are empty and desolate. The common is a gray



waste under a sunless sky. The rain has ceased, but there is an all-pervading dampness. The solitary porter at the station is dumbfounded at sight of a passenger. His brother in portorage has been knocked off for the winter, and this one's post is all but a sinecure. He devotes himself chiefly to agriculture on strips of kitchen-garden that border the line.

'But you belong somewhere hereabouts, don't you, sir?' he inquires of Herman, anxious to account for the phenomenon of his appearance.

'Yes; I am going to Lochwithian Priory.'

'Yes, indeed, sir. I thought I knew your face. Strangers don't often come this way in winter. Shall I take your portmanteau down to the Priory, sir?' as if it were a matter of half a mile or so.

'If you like to earn a couple of shillings that way, you can; or I can send one of the Priory men for it.'

'I'll take it, sir.'

Herman has not written to announce his coming. He wants to surprise Editha, and even the idea of an eight-mile walk does not appal him. The clear

sweet air inspires him like a draught of nectar. It is like entering a new world with a new atmosphere after London smoke and fog. ‘Yes, the country is very nice for a change,’ Herman thinks, patronising the prospect, as he looks along the winding road. The calm gray hills are half veiled in silvery mist, the fir-trees by the quarry yonder stand out darkly against a soft gray sky.

‘These are the scenes she loves,’ he tells himself, and he has a friendly feeling for the autumnal landscape, with its subdued colouring and sober light.

It is a long walk for a man accustomed to London paving-stones and hansom cabs; but Herman’s step is light and quick to-day. He was never in better spirits; never, in the first bloom and freshness of his courtship, did he hasten more gladly to the woman he loves. That play at the Pall-Mall will be a success, he feels sure; and his book—he is free to meditate upon that now, and happy thoughts crowd upon him as he walks briskly along that lonely road—going a mile at a stretch sometimes without meeting a human creature; up hill and down dale,

by open common and high-wooded banks, with hills, hills, hills, circling the landscape always; now far off, now near; some of them so gray and distant that they are like shadows of hills faintly defined against a shadowy sky.

He sees the happy valley at last lying below him, steep heathery hills guarding it like giant watch-towers, the gray stones of the ruined Priory showing against the soddened grass. A turn in the road, and the new Priory—the good old Tudor dwelling-house, with its clusters of red-brick chimneys, its stone-mullioned windows—looks down upon him from its elevated position above shrubberied banks and sloping lawns, and the thicket where the young larches shine silvery white in the spring time, and where a few scarlet berries still linger on the mountain ashes, and the last tawny leaves on the young oaks.

How quiet the old house looks on this still autumn day! not a leaf stirring. But for that gray smoke curling slowly upward, it might be a house in a picture.

Great heaven, the blinds are all down! The

church-bell begins to toll dismally. There is some one dead.

Herman stops as if he were turned to stone, and clings to the gate as he counts the strokes of that iron tongue.

## CHAPTER XVI.

‘Twas but just now she went away—  
I have not since had time to shed a tear ;  
And yet the distance does the same appear,  
As if she had been a thousand years from me.  
Time takes no measure in eternity.’

\* \* \* \* \*

‘Nay, wilt thou fill that place by me which is  
Fill’d by dead eyes too tender to know change’  
That’s hardest.’

SEVEN-AND-TWENTY times tolls the bell, telling the age of that departed one for whom it lifts up its iron lamentation. Seven-and-twenty years of age, and Editha is only twenty-three.

‘Thank God, thank God!’ cries Herman. But while the bell has been tolling, he has endured an agony greater than that undisciplined heart of his has ever known before.

He breathes again, and still pauses at the gate wondering. He looks down the little village street, a street of about fifteen houses, and sees that all the windows are darkened. A woman comes to her door

with a broom, and sweeps the threshold with a depressed air. Herman goes across the road to question her. He has not the heart to enter the Priory just yet.

‘Who is dead?’ he asks.

‘Miss Morcombe, sir; the Squire’s eldest daughter and our true friend. She died two hours ago. There isn’t a man, woman, or child within hearing of that bell that hasn’t loved her and been the better for her kindness. It’s a dark day for Lochwithian.’

‘It must have been very sudden,’ says Herman.

Editha’s letters have told him of Ruth’s feeble state, but have been hopeful about her notwithstanding.

‘Yes, sir; it was cruelly sudden. We knew that she was weakly. Dr. Davis has been to see her every day for a long time, and he has shook his head sometimes when he has been asked about her. But the end came very sudden all the same. Poor Miss Editha—I beg pardon, sir, Mrs. Westray—it’s an awful blow for her. But I’m right down glad you’ve come.’

Herman is glad too, even in the midst of his

sorrow. It is something to be here to comfort his darling in this the sharpest trial that has ever come upon her. He goes slowly up to the house, sees one of the old servants, whose eyelids are swollen with weeping.

‘O sir, I am so glad you have come! Poor Miss Editha!’

They call her thus still at the Priory at odd times.

‘Will you tell her that I am here? or can I go to her?’

‘She is up-stairs, sir, in Miss Morcombe’s room. Mr. Petherick is with her, I think.’

‘And the Squire?’

‘Poor dear gentleman, he’s almost distracted. He has shut himself up in his study, and won’t see anybody. It came upon him so sudden, you see, sir. Our dear young lady took a turn for the worse yesterday afternoon, and at daybreak this morning she began to sink.’

Herman goes up to that white-and-green morning-room he knows so well, the place in which he has spent so many an hour of tranquil happiness. The room opening out of this is the death-chamber.

Editha is prostrate on the sofa—Ruth's sofa—her face buried in the silken pillow, sobbing piteously. Good Parson Petherick sits beside her, his hand on her shoulder, his face very pale, and with a look of pain that alters it strangely. At sight of Herman he rises, and resigns his place to the husband.

‘This is well-timed,’ he whispers. ‘She has sore need of comfort. This loss falls heavy upon all of us.’

‘Darling, I am here to share your grief,’ Herman says gently.

Editha starts and trembles at the sound of his voice, then raises herself from the sofa and falls sobbing upon his breast.

‘O Herman, I have lost her—the dearest, the best, and truest. There is none like her. Love me, dear, love me with all your heart. I have only you now.’

‘My dearest, you have had the first place in my heart always, from the first time we met. You have been loved with all my heart; you shall be, while that heart beats. My own one, be comforted. Your sister was like an angel while she was with us; she is with the angels now.’



Hard for a man to say these things who believes in very little, to whom the angelic host are a semi-mythical people popularised by Milton and the Italian painters. But it may be that before the mystery of death even the sceptic believes and trembles.

‘Yes. She has only gone from me a few hours, yet I think of her among the company of angels. I have but to close my eyes, and I can see her in that angelic throng. They turn their shining faces towards me, full of pity, and hers is brightest of all. It is selfish to regret her, selfish sorrow that tears at my heart; but she was so dear—my comforter, my adviser, my guide, my second self!’

‘Dearest, I will try to fill her vacant place; grief shall draw us nearer together. I have been careless, neglectful, self-seeking; but I have never been unfaithful in thought or word or wish. My love has never been lessened. It has grown and strengthened with the progress of our wedded life.’

Mr. Petherick has left them. They are alone together; but their tones are hushed and low, subdued to reverence by that solemn presence in the

adjoining room. Herman tempts his wife out into the garden by and by in the winter dusk, and they walk by the beds where late autumn flowers are fading and by the fountain where they sat together as strangers three years ago. Editha tells her husband about Ruth's illness and that sudden change which heralded death, and there is a melancholy comfort in talking of these things.

‘It was such a peaceful end, Herman. O, may death come to us like that, with a smile of welcome!’

It is afternoon on the day of the funeral. Ruth has been laid in her quiet resting-place. The simple people who have loved her have come from far and near—some who have only known her sweetness from hearsay, but have been not the less the recipients of her bounty. All is over. The weeping crowd has dispersed; the Priory windows let in the cold gray light upon rooms that seem desolate, though *she* rarely entered them.

Her will is read to the little circle—father, sister, Herman, Mr. Petherick, and the faithful old upper

servants. How loving, how thoughtful of those she loves, is the disposal of her small property! It is only two hundred a year she has to deal with, yet she remembers every one.

She leaves her capital in trust, making Mr. Petherick and Herman joint trustees. Fifty pounds a year is to be paid the Squire for his life, 'so that my dear father may buy something for his home-farm, and think it is a birthday present from his loving daughter.' This fifty pounds is to revert to Editha at the Squire's death. A hundred a year is left to Editha unconditionally. The remaining fifty is also left to Editha, for half-yearly distribution among certain pensioners whose names are duly set down.

To each of the old servants Ruth bequeaths some token of her love: to one her wardrobe, to another her watch, to others small sums of money.

To Herman and Mr. Petherick she leaves her library, to be equally divided; to Editha the harmonium and many small objects of art which she has purchased from time to time.

After the reading of the will Herman and his

wife stroll out into the garden and along the road, where the dusk is thickening.

They have talked of their beloved dead and of little else since Herman's coming. It is as if they had been living in some strange semi-spiritual world—a border-land between life and death. The landscape has an unsubstantial air to Herman's fancy in the sombre light.

‘Is she not good, Herman—thoughtful, tender, loving?’ asks Editha, pondering upon Ruth's will.

‘She is all that the pure-minded and perfect are, dearest: a woman without thought of self; and her sister is like her.’

‘They speak of their dead in the present tense still.

‘And now, love, let us talk of our future,’ says Herman, anxious to divert his wife's mind from that one subject on which she has brooded for the last six days and nights. ‘We have the whole business of life to settle: a home to find, a nursery for baby, a coach-house for baby's perambulator. We cannot stay with the Squire for ever, you know: a whole family—husband and wife and baby and nurse. It is too much for paternal affection.’

‘ Papa would be glad to have us for the rest of our lives, Herman.’

‘ My dearest, it would be death to my manhood. I should fold my hands and sit down, like the companions of Ulysses, and meditate for years upon some *magnum opus* never to be written. I should be too lazy to put pen to paper if there were no butcher and baker to be satisfied, if I were never reminded that I have given hostages to Fortune. Who loves work for its own sake? Not I, for sure. Who would not rather lie among the bluebells in the April woods, or ride over the crisp leaves in autumn, than sit at his desk and labour to reduce airy fancies, happy thoughts, vague unfinished dreams into clear and harmonious prose? No, love; we must have a house of our own, and I must see the baker’s cart under my window every morning to remind me that I am a bread-winner.’

‘ Then you would much rather we had our own house, Herman?’

‘ Yes, dear, though it were a hovel, *pourvu* the drainage was decent, and though we lived on bread-and-cheese.’

‘Yet you were so particular about the dinners at Fulham.’

‘That is past and gone. At Fulham I was the slave of worldly passions, epicureanism was exacerbated by the knowledge of half a dozen West-end clubs within reach. Your club is the nursery-garden where the weed selfishness grows into a tree big enough to overshadow the land. We will live on bread-and-cheese, darling, with a haunch of Radnorshire mutton on high days and holidays, and a capon from papa’s poultry-yard now and then on a Sunday or a birthday. I daresay, if we lived near enough, your father would find us in milk and garden-stuff.’

‘As if papa would grudge us anything! He has given baby such a beautiful cow, a perfect pet, like Landseer’s in the “Maid and the Magpie.” Would you mind coming a little way farther, Herman? There is a house I should like so much to show you.’

This little domestic talk has brightened her. There is more cheerfulness to be extracted from these commonplace subjects sometimes than from all the philosophy of Plato or Bacon.

They turn into a narrower road, that climbs a little way up the base of the hill. Here they find a garden, guarded by a holly-hedge, surrounding a rustic cottage of the Anglo-Swiss type.

Editha lifts the latch, and they go in. The garden is in perfect order. A few late roses linger still on the standards and on the cottage walls. The lawn is like velvet, the gravel-paths carefully rolled.

‘Is this the house you talked of, Editha?’

‘Yes, dear.’

‘But you told me it was empty, neglected.’

‘So it was a month ago. But it has been taken and furnished since then.’

‘What a pity!’

‘Do you think we could have afforded the rent, fifty pounds a year?’

‘A bagatelle. Bridge-end House was a hundred-and-twenty.’

‘But the furniture?’

‘Ah, that’s a poser; for I am determined to eschew credit. Do you know the new tenants?’

‘Intimately.’

‘How nicely they’ve done up the place, and what pretty curtains!’ exclaims Herman, looking at the cretonne draperies of the drawing-room window.

‘Do you think so? I’m so glad,’ cries Editha, radiant.

Herman looks at her wonderingly; but she runs on before and opens the hall-door, a half-glass door, through which he sees the bright little hall: chromo-lithographs on the pale-green walls, a statuette here and there.

‘You may come in, you may look about; I know the tenant quite well. She will not be angry,’ cries Editha; and her husband follows.

Hand in hand they go from room to room. All is pretty, simple, cottage-like, bright and fresh and innocent as a summer morning. In one of the three bedchambers there is a brazen cot, with white curtains bordered with modern point-lace. The drawing-room chimney-piece has its border of point-lace also, that artistic reproduction of old designs in which Editha excels, by the way.

‘Now for the Bluebeard chamber,’ says Editha, as she pauses at a door on the stairs, and gives



Herman a key. 'Open it yourself, dear, if you please.'

He unlocks the door and goes in, Editha close behind him. This is the largest room of all; the floor stained to resemble oak, and well bee's-waxed; a small Axminster carpet in the centre; a large polished pitch-pine writing-table with many drawers; an easy-chair; a pair of Glastonbury chairs, pitch-pine like the desk; pitch-pine bookshelves from floor to ceiling all round the room; a book-ladder; and in the window, which commands a mighty sweep of hill and valley, Editha's own particular work-table, which Herman sent down to the Priory after the sale.

'What does it all mean, Editha? Surely that is your work-table, or I am dreaming.'

'It means that this is our house, dear Herman. The furniture is Ruth's last gift. She never took more pleasure in anything earthly than in the furnishing of this house. I would not tell you a word about it in my letters. I wanted to surprise you.'

'As if any act of womanly goodness in you or

Ruth *could* surprise me,' says Herman, clasping her to his heart.

'It was all Ruth's doing,' Editha murmurs tearfully; 'the greatest happiness I looked forward to in this house was to have lived near her, to have seen her every day, and now I am only near her grave.'

She keeps back her tears bravely, not willing to spoil Herman's welcome to his new home.

Selina—the faithful Selina, humble friend in the hour of trouble—comes in smiling with a teatray. She is neatly clad in half-mourning, and wears a pretty little mobcap—stupendous concession. But then caps are coming into fashion, and her mistress wears the same coiffure in the morning.

'Isn't that a Fulham face?' asks Herman.

'Yes; I sent for Selina directly the house was ready. She is the best of girls; and I have a Welsh cook who is a pattern of economy. Nurse is going back to town, and Selina and I are going to take care of baby between us. I am not going to ruin you a second time, Herman.'

Whereupon Herman Westray protests that in

him and not in Editha lay the primal cause of their ruin.

‘And are you sure you like the house, dearest?’ asks the wife anxiously, as they sip their afternoon tea beside the fire, which burns so brightly on the hearth of home. ‘Everything is very plain. I was determined to be economical, but I tried to choose artistic-looking things.’

‘And you have succeeded, dearest. This house looks like the home of an artist.’

‘See how many book-shelves I have given you. I felt that in the country you would want more books than in town.’

‘My wisest and best! Yes, I shall turn book-collector. That side for books of reference; that block facing the window for history; a corner for philosophy; a shelf or two for the good old divines with their strong ponderous English; the poets on each side of the fireplace, nearest to hearth and heart.’

They sit talking till it is quite dark outside that large square window facing the hills. Selina comes in to ask if they would like candles.

‘No, Selina; we must go home to dinner. Shall we come here for good to-morrow, Herman?’

‘We cannot come too soon. I’ll telegraph to the Pantehnicon for my books; I saved those from the wreck, you know. And now I want to tell you about my new piece. It is to be played in December.’

‘At the Frivolity?’ asks Editha, with a quiver of pain.

They are in the dark road by this time, arm-in-arm.

‘No, dear; I write no more for Mrs. Brandreth. God grant that Mrs. Brandreth and I may never meet again! I told you in one of my letters that I had discovered the sender of that telegram, and begged you to ask me no more till we met.’

‘Yes, Herman. I obeyed you.’

‘Mrs. Brandreth was the person who sent it.’

‘Yes, Herman.’

‘And Mrs. Brandreth was—’

‘The woman who jilted you. I was told that, and I was told that you had never ceased to love her.’

‘You were told by a liar and a villain, Editha.

My heart has never swerved from its devotion to you. I turn my back upon the world I have loved too well without one pang of regret. I look forward to our tranquil life among these hills with unalloyed delight.'

## CHAPTER XVII.

‘The good make a better bargain, and the bad a worse, than is usually supposed ; for the rewards of the one, and the punishment of the other, not unfrequently begin on this side of the grave.’

THERE is a fatal kind of success which attends the desperate player in life's hazard. Myra Brandreth has lost all—love, hope, self-respect ; her prosaic but most faithful adorer, Lord Earlswood, and his following, which made up no inconsiderable part of her circle. The best people were for the most part brought to her Sunday-evening receptions by Lord Earlswood. Now that Lord Earlswood comes to her no longer, these best people drop away. They have an idea that she is not quite the correct person they imagined her, or else why does not Earlswood, whose platonic regard for her in days past was beautiful to see, marry her now that he is a free man ?

Society opines that Lord Earlswood has found out something to Mrs. Brandreth's disadvantage.

As to what the something may be society speculates ingeniously, and there are various theories.

Society is confirmed in its notion by the sale of the Frivolity Theatre, which Lord Earlswood disposes of to an enterprising stockbroker, who is only too glad to renew Mrs. Brandreth's lease on favourable terms.

Myra has lost all except her art: that stands her in good stead. Herman's promised piece having been withdrawn, she looks about her for something that will startle the town. She will have nothing of the cup-and-saucer comedy school. She wants strong dramatic situations, tragic even—a play that her audience will dream about. She wants to make such an effect as Rachel made in *Adrienne Lecouvreur*.

Naturally she looks to the French stage for the source of the new play. She goes to Paris and sees a piece which has made itself the talk of that enlightened metropolis, partly from the audacity of subject and treatment, partly from the powerful acting of that lovely comédienne, Madame Fine-mouche, as the heroine. Even Parisian critics hint

that the piece is 'tant soit peu hasardée,' and recommend that 'les jeunes demoiselles, et même les jeunes mariées,' should refrain from attending the representation thereof.

'C'est d'une audace magnifique ! Cela va jusqu'au sublime ! On y rencontre des élans d'un véritable génie Dantesque. C'est la corruption dans toute son effrayante nudité exposée aux yeux par le ciseau d'un Michel Ange. C'est d'une desinvolture à faire rougir Belot,' and so on, cry the critics in all the notes of the critical scale.

Mrs. Brandreth sees this play, is thrilled with admiration at Madame Finemouche's performance, feels that it is a piece to outrage every English prejudice, to take the town by storm, and draw no end of money, and makes up her mind to do it. She will transfer it to the stage of the Frivolity boldly, nakedly, as it is played in Paris. She will intrust the translation to some experienced dramatist, strong enough to turn brilliant French into sound and forcible English. She sees *L'Ange Déchu* on half a dozen consecutive evenings ; gives her mind to the play absolutely for a whole week ; learns every turn



of Finemouche's head, every look, every tone, every phase of agony in the great poisoning-scene at the end, where this angel of corruption, *aux abois*, poisons herself, after having tried, more or less vainly, to poison her rival, her husband, and one or two other personages who are obstacles in the broad path of passion.

Mrs. Brandreth turns Madame Finemouche's creation inside out, as it were, and then determines to play the part in an entirely original manner. She in no wise denies the genius of the lovely Parisienne, but she will give the world of London her own conception of the character; and those who have seen the piece in Paris, and who might naturally expect a faithful copy of the author's original interpreter, shall discover her power to achieve new and grander effects than the French-woman, *avec tout son Latin*, has been able to produce.

Mrs. Brandreth goes back to London with *L'Ange Déchu* in her pocket, and the right to produce a literal translation of the same bought and paid for. She gives the play to Marcus Willoughby,

a clever young dramatist who has written successfully for the Frivolity a season or two ago, and who enjoys the advantage of being dramatic critic on three or four journals of more or less importance.

‘Well, my dear Mrs. Brandreth,’ he begins, when he calls upon the manageress next day in Kensington Gore, ‘I have read your piece, and—’

‘You like it?’ inquires Myra.

‘I think it extraordinarily powerful, startling, daring. The French are so much in advance of us in that line. Yes, it’s a fine piece, no doubt; but it will want no end of alteration before you can think of producing it at the Frivolity. In fact, so much alteration, there are such inherent difficulties, that I scarcely see my way to adapting it.’

‘I don’t want it adapted,’ answers Myra coolly. ‘I thought I told you that I wanted a translation. I have had enough of adaptations—whitewashed inanities, with no more flavour in them than there is in peaches preserved in tins. All I ask from you is terse and epigrammatic dialogue, and rigorous condensation in the mawkish scenes where the good people are talking.’

‘My dear Mrs. Brandreth, it’s impossible. Have you read the piece?’

‘I have seen it exactly six times, and read it twice.’

‘And you absolutely mean to play it? You’ll ruin the theatre—even if you can get the play licensed, which I doubt.’

‘I’ll bring all London to the theatre. As for the Chamberlain—well, I fancy the immorality is too refined to appear in a hasty perusal. We must try and smuggle it through somehow.’

‘Why not make Angèle Villeroy’s sister instead of his wife, and Lavignon a bachelor? There would be no harm then in their love scenes. We might make some clause in the father’s will the obstacle to their marriage.’

‘A purely English style of construction, in which probability is sacrificed to propriety. In order to escape the charge of immorality, we make our plots more improbable than the wildest fairy tale. Now your French dramatist starts with a motive strong enough to overturn a family or an empire, and builds his dramatic edifice upon a substantial

foundation. 'Translate this play faithfully, Mr. Willoughby, or leave it alone.'

Mr. Willoughby obeys, glad to earn the wages of his labour. The play is a commission, and whether the Chamberlain licenses the piece or not, the translator must be paid. He does his best, doubtful as he feels about the issue, and works with an artistic pleasure in the manipulation of a really fine play.

By one of those accidents which make theatrical adventure the most hazardous of speculations, the piece passes the censorship unchallenged, and, after laborious and most conscientious rehearsal, Myra produces the *Fallen Angel*, more extravagantly, more exquisitely mounted than any play she has put upon her stage before. She is very reckless in money-matters this season, less anxious than of old to avoid debt. She gives Mr. Nosotti *carte-blanc* for the furnishing of the drawing-room scene, and the result is a salon Louis Seize, in virgin gold, against a background of apple-green satin. As for Mrs. Brandreth's dresses, they are miracles of art and costliness, and turn the heads of half the women in

London. Peacock's feathers, point-lace, beetles' wings, mother-of-pearl, diamonds. She rings the changes on the whole gamut of finery. But in the last act, the scene in which she achieves her triumph, she stands before her breathless audience robed in white cashmere, statuesque, classic as Rachel in Racine's *Phedre*. The friendly newspapers praise the piece, but with caution; the critical journals—the *Censor* and *Scourge*, *Connoisseur* and *Microcosm*—set up a howl of denunciation, charging the virtuous British public to avoid the Frivolity as a pest-house infected with French poison. But Myra's acting has taken the town by storm before the *Censor* or the *Scourge* has come out with its condemnatory analysis of the piece. Everybody talks of her—everybody rushes to see her. That serpent-like grace, that poetic despair, that agonising death in the last scene—these things have thrilled to the heart of society, always ready for a sensation. The favourite question to start a dinner-table conversation—even before Patti or the Royal Academy—is, 'Have you seen Mrs. Brandreth in the *Fallen Angel*?'

Once more in her life Myra Brandreth tastes the sweetness of artistic success. She drains the intoxicating cup greedily ; makes the most of her triumph ; shows herself in the Park, wearing that last fashionable combination of feathers and flowers which is called the Fallen Angel bonnet, because Mrs. Brandreth has first exhibited this particular style of head-gear in the famous play. She drives a Victoria elegant and airy enough for Queen Mab, and a new pair of horses for which she has given six hundred pounds—she, the prudent housewife, whose care hitherto has been to make the greatest show with the smallest outlay, and to save money for evil days to come. She gives more dinners than usual this season, and talks of taking a house in Park-lane.

So the season goes on. Everybody—except quite young persons—sees the *Fallen Angel*. The play will run till the end of the season, may run for any number of seasons, one would suppose, from the rush there is to see it just now. Places are to be booked three weeks or a month in advance. The theatre overflows nightly. There are morning performances. Mrs. Brandreth plays Angèle de Ville-

roy twice every Saturday—seven times a week in all, an exhausting labour.

The season is at its height, when one afternoon in the Park there is a rumour—no one knows who originated it—that Mrs. Brandreth is ill, very ill, some sudden and dangerous attack, and that there will be no performance at the Frivolity this evening.

A few people who have taken places look blank, and wonder whether it is ‘play or pay,’ whether their payments will hold good for another night, or whether, the entry being ‘scratched,’ they will forfeit their money.

‘What’s the matter with her?’ asks Lady Leo Hunter of little Mr. Spinx of the clubs. ‘Has she lost her voice, poor thing?’

‘Worse than that, I’m afraid. A fellow I know was at the theatre last night, and told me just at the last, after she’d taken the poison, you know, she staggered to the lights, stared wildly round the house as if she was looking for some one, and then fell suddenly forward—a very awkward fall, knocking her head against the angle of a table. Young Brown says, if he hadn’t seen her in the piece so

often, he should have thought it was all in the part—that awful stare round the house, and the cropper against the table, and all—ultra-realistic, you know; but knowing her business in the poison scene by heart, he knew there must be something queer. She was called for, as usual, directly the curtain was down, and after the audience had amused themselves by making a row for ten minutes or so, the stage-manager came on, and regretted to inform them that Mrs. Brandreth had fainted after the fatigue of the performance, and was too indisposed to appear in answer to their gratifying summons.’

‘Then it was only a fainting fit, I suppose,’ says Lady Hunter.

‘Queer kind of fainting fit, according to Charley Brown. He’d noticed all through that last act that she talked rather queerly—muddled her words somehow—jumbled the syllables together. He says he doesn’t expect she’ll act again until she’s been to Malvern, or Ems, or Chiswick, or somewhere, and been patched up by the doctors. Cerebral excitement, Charley says, something queer in the upper story. He goes to her Sunday evenings, and knows



a good deal about her. She has been more excitable lately than she used to be—Charley says it's a case of brandy or chloral.'

Mr. Brown proves himself a shrewd observer. The Frivolity is closed that evening, and until the end of the week, on account of Mrs. Brandreth's serious indisposition, say the advertisements in the daily papers. Paragraphs appear in the newspapers to the effect that the accomplished actress has overtasked her strength, that the scabbard is out of repair, the sword having been a trifle too sharp for it. Tension of nerves, exalted temperament; the papers ring the changes on this theme, and announce that Sir William Gull has made this interesting case his especial care; but no paragraph states the precise nature of Mrs. Brandreth's malady.

Society talks a good deal and speculates widely. The favourite theory is that Mrs. Brandreth has gone clean out of her mind, and is languishing in a suburban establishment, under distinguished medical treatment. Society opines that Lord Earlswood's unkindness is the cause of this calamity; and, wax-

ing compassionate, pronounces that his lordship has behaved badly.

The house in Kensington Gore is shut up. The Frivolity reopens after less than a week's *relâche*. *Kismet* is revived, with Miss Belormond, desperately coached, in Mrs. Brandreth's part, and fails to attract large audiences. The evil genius of burlesque gets possession of the delightful little theatre; fast young men, and women in doubtful toilettes and dyed hair, frequent the stalls that were erst the resort of the best people in London. The newspapers lament Mrs. Brandreth's absence, and an occasional paragraph informs the public that a new comedy by an eminent hand is in progress, in which the accomplished actress will reappear.

Little by little, before the season is quite over, the truth leaks out. The awful word paralysis is whispered here and there; and society, after setting up its own idea of lunacy, gets to know somehow that Myra Brandreth is being drawn about the quiet avenues of Leamington in a Bath-chair, helpless, fretful, semi-idiotic. The over-worked mind has given way. A paralytic stroke has been followed

by softening of the brain : and for Myra this world is henceforth a faint and shadowy picture, and one day followeth another without progress or difference. There is neither yesterday nor to-morrow in this death-in-life : time is an endless to-day.

Before the unfolding of the gummy chestnut buds in Kensington Gardens, Lord Earlswood reappears in the only world which his wearied soul finds tolerable. He has spent his winter in wanderings far and wide—has tried yachting in the Mediterranean, and has been all but capsized in a sudden squall—has hunted in the Campagna, and assisted at a Roman steeplechase—has spent February and March in a boat between Cairo and the cataracts—and has found all these various modes of getting rid of time and money equally insupportable.

On returning to London and civilisation he throws himself vehemently into coaching, and drives the finest team of roans ever seen in the Park with some skill and a countenance of unalterable gloom. He has a skewbald team, hideous beyond expression, and painfully suggestive of Astley's Amphitheatre and

the cavalry of Hyder Ali or Timur the Tartar, but reputed the finest possible thing in skewbalds. These he drives on alternate days, with the faithful Shlooker on the box beside him, and a friendly group of the worst men in London behind. No feminine form has ever been seen on Lord Earlswood's drag.

‘I wouldn't have so much as a mare in my stable,’ says his lordship when rallied on that deliberate avoidance of the sex which has lately been a marked idiosyncrasy in this shining light of the Coaching Club. ‘I wouldn't have anything to remind me that there are women in the world—I hate them so.’

In the indulgence of this idiosyncrasy Lord Earlswood withdraws himself wholly from general society—is never known to enter opera-house or theatre—begins his day at about five in the afternoon, when he dresses for parade in Hyde Park, and finishes his evening, at the last fashionable temple dedicated to the worship of blind-hookey or poker, just when the east brightens with pearl and rose, and the thrushes and blackbirds stir themselves in their nests and break forth into little gurgles and gushes of rejoicing.

At this tender half-mysterious hour Lord Earlswood may be seen emerging from the fashionable temple, a little the worse for his worship of the goddess Fortune—pale, gloomy of brow, and with eyes that are glassy from the glare of the gas.

His friends and followers opine that Lord Earlswood is going, at a very decent pace, to the dogs; but as he is temperate in his habits still and has no low vices, it may reasonably be hoped that, despite his aversion from the sex, some really good woman may yet take him in hand, reform him, and make him happy. The mothers of Belgravia have an eye upon him, and at the least sign of repentance he will be welcomed back to the fold. And, O, will there not be rejoicing over the return of such an eligible sinner!

Placidly pass the days in Herman's new home among the hills. Nearly a year has gone since Editha first brought her husband to the cottage, which they have christened Crowsnest, and Herman has taken no advantage of the loop line which brings the rail to Lochwithian, and makes Shrewsbury and

London so much the more accessible. He has often talked of running up to town, but he has not yet gone; and he wonders at himself not a little, and wonders still more at the various occupations afforded by rustic life. He has his library and his garden, both hobbies in a mild way. He has a couple of handsome hacks for Editha and himself, and a cast-iron pony for a basket carriage, and a good deal of horse-worship goes on every morning between nine and ten in the sweet clover-scented stable, where the decorative work in plaited straw is a sight to see. They ride, they drive baby in the pony-carriage. They sketch a little occasionally, they go fern-hunting, botanise a little, and set up a wilderness on the outskirts of their orderly garden, to which they bring the woodland and hillside flowers they find in their rambles. Herman gets to know the hills by heart, and takes them to his heart, as Editha has done. They have more friends than they can count; these honest warm Welsh hearts have opened very wide to receive Herman Westray.

The simple pleasures of his life leave him ample time for his work. He has those tranquil evening

hours—between sundown and midnight—at which he has ever found his brain most active, his fancy brightest. He spends many a long summer day reading and musing over his books in the garden, and he contrives to read more in this last summer than in any year of his life since he gave his laborious hours to the Greek dramatists, philosophers, and historians in Balliol's stately groves.

In this pure air, among these breezy hills, the baby grows and flourishes abundantly, an object of universal love, a blooming blue-eyed boy, bestowing affection as lavishly as he receives it, but loving mamma best of all, as he informs his friends candidly, in his imperfect utterance. He loves Jack the pony *very* much, and papa, and Swish the Scotch terrier, and grandpa, and Mr. Pezzerit (infantine for Petherick); but mamma is first and best, mamma is so good—everybody loves mamma best. And Editha presses the chubby flatterer to her heart, and blushes at his praise.

Herman does good work in that quiet room facing the hills—work that he knows and feels to be honestly done—not that old slap-dash colouring of his, with

more of the palette-knife than the brush, and the canvas a little too obvious through the paint; work that he would believe in were it even a failure in its immediate effect upon the world. Happily his new book is not a failure. The *Censor* has its accustomed sneer. The *Microcosm* is doubtful, and compares Herman disparagingly with its half dozen pet authors—writers whose works enjoy a limited sale and the approval of high-class critics. The *Connoisseur* praises the book warmly, and the public are delighted with it. This last book is more popular than anything Herman has ever written, and Editha has the delight of knowing that she has helped her husband, instead of hindering him in his onward and upward career. Sweet are those autumn days in which Herman gives himself a holiday after the publication of his last story, and Editha and he go together to explore the wilder scenery of North Wales. The descendant of the Cimbri glows with patriotic pride as they stand beside the Swallow Falls, and Herman acknowledges that there is nothing in Switzerland finer than this Cambrian cataract. Still sweeter is it a little later in the evening, as they



drive back to their hotel in the twilight, to hear him say with conviction, ‘ Editha, this has been the happiest year in my life.’

THE END.

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